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Navigating Learning in Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Navigating Learning in Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon

By

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This study examines the navigation process related to education in Bhutan. In the 1960's Western education came to Bhutan which already had a Buddhist monastic education system and an informal system using traditional methodologies. Currently all aspects of society, including education, are being aligned to Bhutan's development policy based on Gross National Happiness (GNH).

Data for this qualitative research study was collected through interviews in Bhutan and ongoing communication with Bhutanese educators and school reformers. Eight people educated only or first through traditional methodologies were interviewed as well as six who had a combination of Western and traditional education. Three common themes emerged across groups: 1) formal learning was seen as related to spiritual/moral development, 2) experiences of learning were associated with a sense of meaning and personal/internal motivation, and 3) alphabetic literacy was seen to be strongly related to formal learning. Also common to all groups was participation in some type of non-Western learning methodology. Further study of such experiences seems very relevant to creating an education system in Bhutan based on GNH.

The navigation processes of two education organizations in Bhutan were also compared and contrasted. Both face similar issues but have very different functions

and goals. The Institute of Language and Cultural Studies (ILCS) began as a monastic school for lay people and is now part of the Royal University of Bhutan. In its process of change, it has retained its traditional languages and monastic curriculum while adding a more student-centered pedagogy, study of the English language, and technology.

The Royal Education Council (REC) is a temporary organization commissioned by the King to align the education system with GNH. The work of the REC is to reform the current imported Western style system to form a new system based on student-centered models which incorporates traditional values and prepares students to function in the broader world. Study of this navigation can inform Western educators about the conscious process of school reform.

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## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Different ways of living have always come into contact, but for a period of time in the not so distant past, many groups of people lived in relatively isolated and stable communities where most of their contact with outsiders was with those having a similar way of life. However, this situation began to change with Western colonization and is becoming less and less common with the globalization of recent decades. More and more people living in their traditional, formerly isolated homelands now are having to come to terms with very different ways of living moving into their space through modern education, technology and global marketing (Ames & Hershock, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). This coming together of two ways of living brings about the need for the navigation of different social and cognitive structures by individuals and social organizations. I am particularly interested in how this navigation can be done consciously in a way that creates new ways of living by adapting what fits from contact with others and combining that with what already exists.

The use of the term “navigation” implies there is some choice and purpose, often called agency in social science literature, involved in what is done by individuals and groups when different ways of living come into contact. The term also implies that some type of skill or ability exists for knowing what can be changed and what needs to be retained from the past in order to create the new desired way of living. This ability is related to the cognitive aspect of navigation. Each way of living has its

social structures which must be navigated. However, people not only have to navigate these external social structures but must also navigate cognitive structures, sometimes described as orders of consciousness (Kegan, 1994) or logical types (Bateson, 2000), in order to avoid “cultural traps” or dead ends and to create a new way of living (Bohanan, 1995).

This navigation can take place when a modern way of living is brought by travelers or conquerors into a space with a long standing way of living already established, or it can happen when immigrants bring their traditional way of living into a space with a modern way of living established. The latter is the context in which my original interest in this topic developed.

Coming from a family in which my grandparents were German-Russian immigrants who settled in western Nebraska, I have been observing and participating in such navigation from childhood to the present. My family and the German-Russian community I was part of had a way of living which valued the hands-on-knowledge of farming, passed on traditional knowledge through stories and memorization, and followed a pietistic religious practice of separation from modern worldly amusements and consumption. This way of living was in contrast to the modern American way of living with its emphasis on academic knowledge mastered for future economic success and increased consumption which I came into contact with in Western schooling. The differences between these two ways of life that I had to participate in required that I find a way to navigate between them. Also my work as an ESL instructor for both international and immigrant students in the U.S. and as

an academic counselor for high school students who were preparing to be first generation college students has given me further opportunities to be involved in the navigation process between different ways of living and learning.

### **Different Ways of Navigating**

As I have attempted this navigation and watched others in their navigation processes, I observed that some people reacted to contact with another way of living defensively by trying to keep the old way of living completely unchanged, others attempted to completely get rid of the old way of living and become part of the new way of living, and some found ways of creating a life that incorporated both ways of living. This incorporation sometimes happened with little consciousness of the process and resulted in a way of living that seemed to be split into disconnected parts with no clear sense of direction, or it produced a new integrated way of living but little ability to express how it was created.. However, I did encounter and read about a few people who made these acts of incorporation a conscious part of their navigation process which they could clearly describe. In their navigation process they deliberately chose elements from both ways of living that fit with the values and form of the new integrated way of living they were creating (Babcock, 1986; Bohanan, 1995; Hall, 1976; Rogoff, 2003). I became intrigued with how they were able to do this as well as with the question of whether it is possible for a group of people such as a country or organization to do the same thing.

These two questions became the impetus for my current research which is focused on how individuals and organizations are carrying out this navigation,

particularly in the area of education, in the small Buddhist constitutional monarchy of Bhutan. Bhutan has a development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) which has the goal of creating a society with a balance between modern economic development and Bhutan's traditional Buddhist values of happiness and peace, only incorporating those aspects of modern economic development that do not conflict with happiness and peace if there is a tension between the two (Bhutan PC, 1999). There is a conscious effort being made in Bhutan to align all aspects of life with GNH. The term "navigation" has been used in relationship to the journey toward reaching GNH goals by Bhutanese scholar and National Councilor Karma Ura (2008).

#### **Initial Focus on Methodologies and their Relationship to Navigation**

My dissertation proposal did not focus on looking at the whole navigation process but only considered one aspect of it. My plan was to look at traditional educational methodologies, sometimes called "traditional literacies" (Goody, 1968; Street, 1985), which differ from the methodology of modern Western schooling. I wanted to learn about the experiences of people who had been trained only or first in the non-Western methodologies of argumentation, apprenticeship/mentorship, focused memorization, awareness/perception/intuition training and storytelling before participating in Western schooling so that I could see how these methodologies affect people's ways of thinking and values and if training in them created or strengthened the ability to move easily between learning contexts and ways of living including being able to succeed in Western higher education. Some

of these methodologies are occasionally used in Western schools, but they are not the foundation methodology of Western schooling systems. I see these non-Western methodologies as focusing more on form and process in holistic learning rather than focusing on knowledge as content divided up into many disconnected standards or disciplines as is common in Western education methodology (Hall, 1976).

My initial interest in these methodologies and their relationship to the navigation between education systems came through a conversation with cognitive psychologist and naturopathic physician Robert Reynolds. He commented that some of the best students he had studied with or taught in Western universities had been trained first in systems using traditional methodologies like focused memorization and argumentation. These students seemed to have been able to navigate well between these two worlds of learning, so I wondered if their original training helped them to develop that ability. I also wondered whether some methodologies are compatible with certain values and abilities while others are not compatible with those values and abilities and how such compatibility can be determined by those developing an education system.

In order to look further into these questions, I began searching for places in the world where I could find people who had only or first participated in learning through these non-Western methodologies. I wanted to find and study people who met my criteria before they disappeared due to the rapid spread of Western education to all parts of the world. After some searching, I found that Bhutan was one of the countries where Western education arrived latest. The majority of Bhutanese over

forty have not attended Western style schools (Phuntsho, 2008). I decided to focus my research there. My plan was to study people who had experiences of these traditional learning methodologies, but I was ready to also learn more about how people were navigating the changes that had come to Bhutan with the introduction and growth of Western style schooling.

Since in both cases I was concerned with experience as lived by the participants, I decided to use a qualitative research methodology (Agar, 1999; Brown, 1996; Sherman & Webb, 1988). I planned to use open-ended interviews with a general interview guide approach for my interviews with the traditionally educated participants (Patton, 1990; Schensuel, Schensuel, & LeCompte, 1999).

### **Change to Research Focus on the Whole Navigation Process**

Robert Reynolds and I visited Bhutan for two weeks in March 2008. I did interview a number of people who had been trained only or first in the traditional methodologies in which I was interested. Although they all experienced some type of traditional learning and did not have to ever or initially navigate formal Western education structures, I realized that most of them had some sense that they had done a kind of navigating among different elements of their lives. However, they saw all the elements as part of a holistic process. They also later observed the introduction of a public Western education system to their society, and some of them commented on the differences between learning currently and in their time.

Through contacts made by our guide, hereditary Lama Ngodup Dorji, I was also able to have conversations and interviews with several people involved in the

monastic education system, some trained in the current Western model public education system and some working on the process of reforming the K-12 system. In addition, I spoke with the deputy director of the Royal Institute of Health Sciences, the director of the hospital at Thimphu, and the director of the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies which began as the first monastic institute for lay people and is now part of the Royal University of Bhutan. During these interviews I learned a great deal about the history of education in Bhutan and the navigation process currently being done in Bhutan to consciously create a new educational system which combines the traditional knowledge and values of Bhutanese society with the research-based best practices of Western style education which are compatible with GNH while allowing the current “chalk and talk” model of Western education to function until the new system is ready.

I realized that I had the opportunity to go beyond looking only at how the different methodologies affected the navigation process to examining the entire navigation process of a country forming its education system from elements of its traditional way of living, the modern way of living as a “developing” nation, and the way of living related to globalization with its “post-modern” implications. Each of these ways of living has its own philosophy, values and social institutions, some of which seem to be contradictory. This navigation process seems to require a clear vision of Bhutan’s own traditional way of living, the values considered essential for the desired way of living compatible with GNH, and an understanding of the history and philosophies of the other ways of living being considered so that only those

elements of each which are compatible with GNH are incorporated into the education system of Bhutan (Sarason, 1996; Silver, 1983; Tharp, 2008). Seeing one's own way of living clearly requires the capacity to consider that way of living as an attribute of one's self rather than as part of the essence of one's self or the natural world, to make it object rather than subject (Bohanan, 1995; Kegan, 1994).

I decided to collect more information on this process through continued conversation with those involved in this navigation in Bhutan and to further examine the literature to see what had been written both theoretically and experientially about this type of navigation process in relation to Bhutan and other situations. There seems to be a gap in the literature related to the actual experiences of those involved consciously in such a navigation process and to an analysis of the factors which can affect the process. There is some literature looking at individual factors and some looking at the whole picture from a theoretical perspective but little looking at the experience of the whole process.

There has been some description of further work needed in this area. A call for more detailed comparative studies of the patterns of flow in cultural change has been made (Bohanan, 1995). The need for more work on a big picture view in relationship to creating a new way of living in Bhutan which incorporates the holistic concept of GNH has been expressed by some scholars (Ura, 2008). Additional studies of the experiences of those navigating the changes that are involved in school reform, with a focus on all the interconnected internal and external elements, are considered to be important for understanding the crucial elements involved in creating an educational

system that will support the values and goals of a society (Sarason, 1996).

Therefore, I decided to focus my research on this navigation process in Bhutan. I still looked first at individuals trained only or first in non-Western methodologies. From my analysis of the interviews of these people I hope to provide more clarity on the essential elements and general benefits of these non-Western learning methodologies and their relationship to the navigation process of creating a new education system aligned with GNH in Bhutan .

I also decided to look closely at the history and experience of the navigation processes of those people involved in the creation of the Royal University of Bhutan, particularly the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies (ILCS)), and in the reform of the K-12 system in Bhutan, including an examination of the education sections of the Bhutanese government's Five-Year Plans. This navigation process is now under the direction of the Royal Education Council (REC) which has the goal of aligning the Bhutanese education system with GNH in a way that encompasses the traditional Bhutanese values of peace and happiness while also preparing students to function in a global world with very prevalent Western education systems (Gyatso, 2008; Penjor, 2008; Wangyal, 2008, personal communications). In interviews, e-mails, and a visit to UCSB, members of the REC, who all have participated in some form of Western education as well as their traditional way of life, have shared about their process of looking at best practices in Western education, determining how both standards and student-centered learning which are often considered contradictory approaches can fit with their goals, discerning how to incorporate GNH values in

their curriculum and education system, and questioning how to help people gain the ability to know what to keep and what to let go of during the process of change (Jamtsho, 2008; Lhamu, 2008; Penjor, 2008.; Wangyal, 2008, personal communications). From my contact with the REC and others involved in the navigation process, I hope to provide some insight into crucial elements of this process of creating a new K-12 and higher education system aligned with GNH in Bhutan.

### **Importance of the Research Topic and Research Questions**

Insights gained from this research which I have agreed to share with the Bhutanese REC may prove helpful for them in their navigation process as a means of making aspects of that process more clear and as a way of looking at it related to the cognitive processes involved in such navigation and the key elements research has shown to be essential for school reform success. It may also provide them with insights into the relationship of the non-Western learning methodologies experienced by many Bhutanese and the creation of an education system aligned with GNH.

This research may also be useful in the navigation process for other countries with extant traditional cultures who have realized that the wholesale adoption or rejection of Western education will not meet their need to create an education system that prepares students for participation in the global world while also maintaining what is essential from their traditional way of living. This includes Native American tribes attempting to recreate their education systems.

There is a danger when different ways of living come into contact that the

navigation process can run into what has been called a “cultural trap” if there is a lack of awareness of the knowledge about the navigation of change, the cognitive structures and processes typically involved in such change, the history and philosophical basis of a traditional way of living, and the history and philosophical basis of the Western way of living in its modern and “post-modern” forms (Agar, 2005; Bateson, 1972; Bohanan, 1995; Doll, 1993; Graff, 2007; Kegan, 1995). This research can add information about aspects of the actual experience of the navigation process related to education in Bhutan in the past and in the current situation of globalization. This can be helpful to those who are or will be in this process so they can avoid pitfalls of the past and recognize when they are moving in a direction compatible with their goals in the process of creating a new way of living.

This work can also provide insight into how an education system can be changed at a philosophical level rather than just a technique level. Since the Bhutanese leaders are attempting to maintain their current educational system while at the same time creating models for a new system, this research can add to the knowledge related to the ability of robust social systems to switch among multiple functionalities and the cognitive processes involved in this “open-ended robustness”(Jen, 2002).

This research can also be useful to Western educators who are attempting to create new forms of education which incorporate elements from different ways of living and learning which are compatible with the goals of the creators. This includes the integrated university movement which is trying to incorporate traditional values

and learning methodologies within Western universities and create a more holistic higher education system. Others who may also find this work of interest are those in the fields of ecology and environmental studies who recognize the need to bring together traditional values such as respect for the environment and compatible aspects of modern development. This work can also be of value to those in the West who are working in school reform, particularly those who are attempting to create K-12 schools with a holistic student-centered philosophy and practice, by providing insight into the navigation process necessary to accomplish this.

### **Research Themes**

The information collected and analyzed in this research addresses the following research themes:

1. What are common characteristics of those Bhutanese trained in non-Western education methodologies? How do these characteristics hold for those receiving Western education? In what ways do the experiences of those traditionally educated relate to the current navigation process of creating an education system in Bhutan which is aligned with GNH?
2. Given the commitment to traditional values, what are some of the challenges faced by two institutions in Bhutan in their navigation process to create a new form of education which combines elements from traditional and Western ways of living? How are those challenges being addressed?

## **Chapter Two**

### **BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

There are several types of background literature related to this research which will be discussed in this chapter. Literature directly related to Bhutan and its development philosophy of GNH and the Buddhist philosophy of education will be discussed in the chapter on the history of Bhutan. The first section of background literature covers some of the elements which may be involved when two ways of living come into contact: traditional learning methodologies and traditional “literacies”. The second section presents selected literature on the history of the current forms of Western education which have come into contact with traditional cultures particularly in relation to philosophical principles and reform efforts. The third section covers literature on the dynamics of cultural change, particularly that type which creates a new culture by combining some elements of the old and the new, and examples of this related to education. The fourth section focuses on the cognitive aspects of this navigation which creates a new way of living.

#### **Traditional Forms of Learning and Literacy**

In times of cultural change traditional educational forms and Western schooling forms come into contact. This section covers the literature on traditional learning methodologies and “literacies.” This literature on traditional learning is important background literature in relationship to Bhutan because many forms of traditional learning have been and continue to be used in Bhutan. There are two types of literature related to traditional learning. There is some overlap in the activities

examined and in the view that non-Western ways of learning have value, but the two sets of literature use different terminologies and often have different focuses. One looks at what are called traditional “literacies” and the other at research on non-Western learning methodologies. The first usually looks at the use of traditional forms of learning in non-Western societies while the second deals with the use of traditional learning methodologies in both Western and non-Western settings. I will look first at literature related to traditional “literacies” and then at literature on five non-Western learning methodologies: apprenticeship/ mentorship, argumentation, awareness/ perception/intuition training, focused memorization and storytelling. In later chapters, I will look at the literature on their use in Bhutan, examine the use of both by those I interviewed in Bhutan, and discuss their relationship to the kind of creative thinking considered necessary for the navigation of creating a new integrated way of living from elements of more than one culture.

### **Traditional “Literacies”**

The literature related to traditional “literacies is of two types. There is some literature which considers skills and competencies in “reading” or recognizing patterns and meanings in domains other than alphabetic literacy to be traditional “literacies” which should be considered to be of equal value as reading and writing alphabetic materials. These include “numeracy and scientific literacy, oral and aural abilities, spatial literacy or graphicacy, visual and aesthetic literacies, and so on” (Graff, 2007, p.21). What these “literacies” actually look like in a traditional society is being studied among the Inuit people in the North West Territories of Canada.

Tribal elders created their own list of traditional “literacies” which were divided into three groups. The first is pre-existing “texts” which include such things as weather, sky and sky beings, land forms and land beings, and water and sea beings. The second is pre-existing and/or created “texts” such as dreams, facial expressions, spirits and mythical creatures, and ocean currents. The third is created “text” which includes tattoos, food, clothing, drum, dances and songs, naming, amulets, stories, arts, tapestries, prints, and writing (Balanoff & Chambers, 2005).

The second type of literature on traditional “literacies” views literacy as a social practice that takes into account culture and local contexts. It relates to people’s choices about how to use alphabetic and other “literacies” in ways that fit their traditional cultures and personal desires rather than just the ways which are promoted by Western schooling (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Reader & Wikelund, 1993; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1993). Street (1993) calls this perspective which views literacy practices as inextricably connected to cultural and power structures in society the “ideological” model of literacy. It is contrasted with the “autonomous” view of literacy which sees literacy as the technical ability to read and write independent from social context (Goody & Watt, 1968; Olson, 1977).

### **Non-Western Learning Methodologies**

. This section looks at literature dealing with five non-Western learning methodologies: apprenticeship/mentorship, argumentation, awareness/ perception/ intuition training, focused memorization, and storytelling. As stated in the introduction these methodologies focus more on form and an integrative process

rather than content divided up into many different subjects. These methodologies are occasionally used in the Western model of schooling but are not usually the main learning methodologies used. The most typical form of Western schooling has a methodology which focuses on content with knowledge divided into various disciplines which are taught as abstract knowledge separate from everyday life and presented in a linear manner with the assumption that the abstract knowledge will automatically translate into practical knowledge if students are taught the skill of analysis (Doll, 1993; Smitherman, 2005). This Western form of education assumes a brain that compartmentalizes and localizes knowledge, in which a single stimulus always leads to a uniform response while the research of Luria, Pietsch, and Pribram indicates that the brain has not only localized functions but also integrative functions with memories being stored holistically (Hall, 1976; Reynolds, R., 2004). Some of these non-Western methodologies seem to be compatible with the development of the integrative functions.

### 1. Apprenticeship/Mentorship

Apprenticeship/mentorship has been studied in a number of traditional societies and in some Western contexts (Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002; Janik, 2005; Lave, 1982; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Scribner, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, McDermontt, & Snyder, 2002). It has often been associated with “everyday cognition,” “communities of practice,” and “zone of proximal development” and has been contrasted to isolated individual and book learning. A great deal has been written relating these concepts to education of children. Learning in this model is

not considered to be separate from everyday living, and learners are seen as becoming members of a community through their learning. Becoming a member of a community is usually presented in a positive light although the downside of communities of practice which can become rigid and abusive of power is sometimes addressed (Wenger, McDermontt, & Snyder, 2002).

In the apprenticeship model practical thinking is usually seen as equally or more valuable than theoretical thinking which has been considered as superior by academics since Aristotle. Learning from this method is considered by some to be context specific with questions about its transferability. The presence of an expert in the skill or content is usually assumed although in Janik's (2005) mentoring model for ESL learning, the mentor is not considered to be an expert but a model or example of lifelong learning.

Apprenticeship was found to be a successful model for learning practical skills like farming, weaving, tailoring, and assembly line work (Cleveland & Soleri, 2002; Lave, 1982; Rogoff, 1984; Scribner, 1984). It was also considered to be helpful for developing useful habits of thinking by Dewey (1902) who often lamented the demise of apprenticeship use in schools. A call for a return to an apprenticeship model in education has been made by some current educators (Gardner, 1993; Gatto, 1990). The mentorship model has commonly been used in the training of physicians (Reynold, R., 2004). A mentorship model has also been asserted to promote non-traumatic creative learning, leading to success for ESL students in language learning and future initiatives (Janik, 2005).

## 2. Argumentation

Argumentation has been used as an educational methodology in a number of systems including Buddhism and Yeshiva as well as in classical Western education. Forensics or debate training has a 2500 year history in the Western tradition from the time of the Greeks and Romans through the Medieval education system of the Catholic Church to the present day. However, its use in modern Western education is minimal except as an extra-curricular activity or elective course. Despite its lack of use by most students, numerous studies of debate in a modern Western context have shown its practice to result in numerous academic and social benefits. The empirical evidence that shows a connection between participation in debate and learning the skills of critical thinking is extensive (Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Freely, 1986; Parcher, 1998). Studies have also shown the value of participation in debate for gaining research skills, oral communication skills, listening skills, and professional career skills as well as obtaining increased knowledge about the world. Substantial numbers of participants in debate who were interviewed reported that debate was the most significant factor in their educational experience (McBath, 1984; Parcher, 1998; Shroeder & Shroeder, 1995). Debate with its argumentation methodology has been shown to have a strong correlation with the goals of a liberal arts education (Hunt 1994; Kruger, 1960; Maiton & Keele, 1984).

Training in debate has been asserted to be critical for participation in political and social life in a democracy, and the founding fathers of the U.S. were trained in formal argumentation (Hunt, 1994). A strong relationship has been shown to exist in

the U.S. and Great Britain between training in debate and having future leadership positions such as being politicians, college presidents, ambassadors, military officers, CEO's, publishers, bankers, judges, and deans of law schools (Parcher, 1998; Pollock, 1982).

Training in the argumentation methodology of debate in non-Western systems has also been shown to be related to the acquisition of certain ways of thinking. The Jewish Yeshiva system is well known for its use of argumentation as a methodology. This type of argumentation study was said to be the application of the scientific method to texts by Yeshiva trained Harvard Medieval scholar, Harry Wolfson (1929). There are verbal exchanges between teachers and students which are then continued by students studying in pairs with each having the task of disputing every point presented on a topic by the other member of the pair. Even though this debate is about a sacred text, this process allows for openness in thinking and a multiplicity of approaches to resolving an issue (Dreyfus, 2003; Halbertal & Halbertal, 1998; Rosenblum, 1998). The mental acuity gained by this type of learning has been correlated with success in other intellectual endeavors. Yeshiva graduates captured 50% of the yearly places on the Columbia Law Review while comprising only 5% of the class. The qualities gained by Yeshiva students make for excellence in computer programming with their time to reach proficiency being  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  the time for average graduates (Rosenblum, 1998).

The use of debate in the training of Buddhist monks is similar to the use in Yeshiva although the format is often a group setting with a lay audience. The

interpretations of sacred texts are intensely yet playfully debated by monks in training. These interactions are considered to foster dialectical thinking in which the truth can be arrived at by reasoning, creativity in thinking, the ability for intense concentration, and oral speaking skills (Cabazon, 1991; Dreyfus, 2003). Debate in this tradition is very intense with much physical gesturing in a type of performance which leads to intense emotional involvement in the topic. As with all forms of debate, skill in the practice can be misused for self-aggrandizement but its benefits are seen to outweigh the dangers by monastery leaders (Dreyfus, 2003).

### 3. Attention/Perception/Intuition Training

I have included attention/perception/intuition training as one category because these terms are sometimes used interchangeably and all include some awareness of one's own mental processes. The intuitive mode of thinking is often associated with creativity in art and science (Bruner, 1960; Koestler, 1964; Noddings & Shore, 1984). Awareness practices have been shown to have a strong relationship to mental and physical health (Reynolds, R., 2004; Shapiro, 1984; Walsh, 2002). The training of attention was said to be the most important aspect of education by William James (1904).

The actual development of an intuitive methodology for curriculum and instruction can be found in a book on the study of intuition by Noddings and Shore (1984). Many examples of the use of intuitive thinking by scientists and artists are presented, and the methodology is described as being characterized by the "commitment of the Will, receptivity, involvement of the senses, the quest for

understanding, and a tension between subjective certainty and objective uncertainty” (p.202). Intuition is said to be that part of the intellect which connects body and mind and is considered to be very important in moral education and the maintenance of positive values. Instruction is provided on how to develop an intuitive education methodology which includes connecting particular content subjects with all sorts of other subjects.

Most of the practices of attention and perceptual training like meditation have been adopted from Eastern spiritual traditions, but much of the research that has been done is on the use of these practices by Western practitioners. The value of attention and perception training for reducing stress and anxiety, bringing awareness to sensory data that is normally masked by automatization, and increasing the ability to focus has been demonstrated by a number of studies (Davidson & Goleman, 1984; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro, 1984; Walsh, 2002). Meditation practice by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students resulted in gains in field independence and decrease in test anxiety (Linden, 1984). Those trained in meditation were shown to have a greater degree of lateral asymmetry on both analytical and spatial tasks and to have enhanced right brain hemispheric functioning which is characterized by a gestalt, holistic, and spatial cognitive style (Bennett & Trinder, 1984; Pagano & Frumkin, 1984). The HeartMath Institute in Northern California has been carrying on research for a decade in public schools across the U.S. The attention and perception training techniques of their program have been demonstrated to reduce general psychological distress, test anxiety, and risky behaviors and to improve test scores,

classroom behaviors, learning, and academic performance (Institute of Heartmath website, 2007).

Contemplative practices including reflection, meditation, and mindfulness journals are being used in special contemplative or creativity and consciousness studies programs and as components of regular classes in the arts and sciences at a number of institutions of higher education including Amherst, Brown, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, MIT, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, the University of Massachusetts, the University of Michigan, and a school for applied sciences in Bad Gleichenberg, Austria. The courses have been well-received by students, and more such courses have been requested. Students have reported being clearer mentally, having less anxiety, being more engrossed in their studies with the ability to absorb more information, being more creative, and feeling more connected to other people (Holland, 2006; Sarath, 2006; Scott, 2005; Zajonc, 2004). Educators in these programs are working to develop curriculum and meaningful assessment methods for such courses (Holland, 2006; Sarath, 2006).

An extremely large amount of literature related to attention/perception/intuition training which is written by people actually from the original spiritual traditions exists in many languages. These focus a great deal on the spiritual benefits of these practices as well as addressing to some degree their benefits for learning and a good life. I cannot cover all of those in this literature review but will only mention a few of them which are available in English about the relationship of these practices to education. These include Indian authors Krishnamurty (1944) and Sri Aurobindo

(1921) and Sufi author Idres Shah ( 1976) with his book on Sufi methodology called *Learning How to Learn*.

#### 4. Focused Memorization

I have used the term focused memorization for this methodology to distinguish it from what is commonly criticized as rote memorization. This type of memorization may involve memorizing material that is not understood at the time but is considered of great importance for the future and part of a practice for mental development. Memorization as a learning methodology has been and continues to be valued by education systems in many traditional societies and was valued as well in Western societies through the early part of the twentieth century. Progressive educators began to denigrate memorization in favor of learning relevant to the life of the child (Dewey, 1902; Hall, 1904). This rejection of memorization became even more pronounced with the recent output based and standards movement (Beran, 2004). A few Western educators still extol the values of memorization for mental development. The memorization of poetry with its rhythm by children is said to teach children something about the patterns and relationships that bind together the words of which it is composed. These include order, measure, correspondence, proportion, balance, symmetry, and temporal relation. It is pointed out that such writers as Shakespeare were the product of a memorizing culture (Beran, 2004; Wood, 2003).

The value of memorization for expertise has also been attested to in the cognitive research world in studies on expertise. It was found that to understand increased

performance over time it was necessary to look at how many patterns a person had memorized and could instantly recognize. For chess that number was found to be 10,000 patterns in order to reach the level of Master. The number would be similar for other fields (Holding, 1985; Simon, 1983). Research on memorization as a methodology for children in a traditional setting in a non-religious context shows that memorization involving chanting and physical tracing of letters, which is related to pattern memorization, has been found to be effective in teaching reading to children in rural Eritrea (Wright, 2001). Luria (1966) found that if children studying Russian were not allowed to vocalize sounds and words when they were learning to write, they made six times the number of errors in spelling as a control group that did the vocalizing naturally. This is considered to be consistent with the arrangement of the brain. The frontal part of the brain where synthesis of thoughts and ideas as well as their expression occurs is concerned with several activities including body movement, memorization, and problem solving (Hall, 1976).

Memorization is valued as a methodology in traditional education systems for several reasons. Along with meditation it can calm and focus the mind thereby developing the attention span and the ability to concentrate. Memorization of sacred texts is considered essential in spiritual traditions because of their spiritual value and also is important so the texts can be easily recalled for use in interpretation and debate over meaning. Memorization is the first step in the studies of a Tibetan Buddhist monk. Use of this methodology is said to reflect the belief that knowledge needs to be immediately accessible rather than just available. Focus on aural

memorization without an initial emphasis on meaning is valued in traditional systems with sacred texts because the text is less easily forgotten with this method. The goal is to make memorization of this rhythmic material a kind of implicit memory which ingrains texts in the mind as if they were a motor skill. Later the memorized material is available for instant recall to be discussed for its meaning or to give guidance in a life situation (Dreyfus, 2003; Graham,1987).

## 5. Storytelling

Storytelling is an educational methodology used all over the world. Much literature has been written on traditional fairy and folk tales. I cannot cover all that literature but will look at some of the relevant literature about the use of storytelling for teaching and learning. Many traditional story texts define ethical perspectives and epistemological views and strengthen collective or social knowledge and identities, including revitalizing disappearing cultures and languages (Evans, 2007; Mello, 2004; Tossa, 2007 ). In addition to their value in supporting cultural identity, a seminal study found the key to school literacy development to be constant exposure to storytelling and narrative discourse at home and in the classroom (Wells, 1986). Traditional stories from a variety of cultural contexts have been found useful in the growth of morality and imagination in children (Coles, 1989; Egan, 1999; Gallas, 1994; Zipes, 1997). Storytelling has been used as a means to revitalize the disappearing language and culture of Isan in northeast Thailand (Tossa, 200 ).

There is a great deal of literature on Sufi stories. Sufi teaching stories are

especially common in Central Asia and the Middle East. They are considered to have a particular structure and to be very effective in developing thinking skills. These stories are considered to be more than just fairy or folk tales but an ancient, irreplaceable method of transmitting knowledge which activates the right side of the brain much more than reading normal prose and helps the listeners develop flexible thinking and understanding of the complexity of the world (Ornstein, 2003; Shah,1968). Thousands of these teaching stories have been collected by Afghan Sufi teacher Idres Shah, and many are now available in English and Spanish. They have been carefully translated to preserve the essential structure which is not usually maintained when they are “Disneyfied” (Mallam, 2005). Use of some of these stories by children at the Rosemount Center for preschool children in Washington has shown positive results for cognitive and emotional development (Samuel, 2005).

### **Literature on History of Current Forms of Western Education**

This study will focus on literature dealing with the history of Western education since the time of what is typically considered the beginning of modernism. There is a large amount of literature related to this history, so I can not cover it all in this review. This is a selective review of literature that will apply to my analysis of education change and school reform in Bhutan

Much of the early literature on the history of Western education discussed mainly the structure of public education systems, the motives of their leaders and the details of their internal policies with little information about the role of schools in the community or the social and cultural structures and processes in which education

was intricately involved (Silver, 1983). However, there is now literature relevant to this study which does deal with these bigger issues and how they have affected educational change and school reform. I will discuss some of that literature now.

Silver (1983) in describing his own work as an example of this type of literature says that this category of work on the history of education is composed of “historical excursions into how people, groups of people, people in action have reinterpreted their world” (p. xi). Others writing this type of literature which looks at the big picture including complex patterns of demographic and urban change which affected schools and the historical role of educational bodies in social and political dynamics include Katz (1987), Tyack (1974), and Kaestle (1973). To some with this view, educational history was said to be not only about the history of public schooling but about “families, churches, libraries, museums, publishers, benevolent societies, youth groups, agricultural fairs, radio networks, military organizations, and research institutes” (Cremin, 1973, p. 11). I will later address why I think it is important for Bhutan to look at its own history of education from this perspective as well as to understand the history of Western education through this lens.

Another type of related literature is that directly discussing the history of educational change and school reform. I will discuss a portion of it which I will use in my analysis of school reform in Bhutan. Some of this literature provides a historical analysis of the internal and external factors which have affected the success of school reform. An overview of the history of education reform plans is provided for Britain and the United States from 1806 – 1984. This includes

these reform plans: Lancastrian, age-graded, Gary, Trump, School Development Plan, and the Coalition of Essential Schools. These plans and other attempts at educational reform are analyzed in light of the essential elements which must be addressed for them to succeed (Farrell, in press; Tharp, 2008). These elements were identified by Sarason (1990) as change theory, teaching theory, the teaching profession, and school power and politics. Some of this type of literature also looks at current school reform as a modern manifestation of the long-standing issue of balancing the oratorical concept of excellence and the philosophical concept of equity in education (Cuban, 1988; Noblit & Dempsey, 1996; Tharp, 2008).

Another strand of literature on the history of Western education is found within the “post-modern” curriculum movement and the group of authors who apply chaos and complexity theory to education. This literature deals with the history of modern educational methods and curriculum. It looks less at the reform process and focuses more on the philosophical premises of modern Western education related to the views of Descartes and Newton; the conflict between Dewey’s view of learning as by-product of experiential activity and Tyler’s model of learning as a “specifically intended, directed, and controlled outcome” that can be measured; and the origin of modern education’s culture of method and set curriculum in the sixteenth century (Doll, 1993 & 2005). This literature also describes the development of “post-modern” or nonlinear education theories and practices which are based upon the “new sciences” of

chaos and complexity. When applied to education, this view emphasizes learning as connected, holistic and meaningful and educational systems as living, complex adaptive systems. (Doll, 2005; Fleener, 2005; Stanley, 2005; St. Julian, 2005). This view of learning as holistic and meaningful is similar to that expressed by many of those involved in learning through traditional methodologies (Bowers, 1997; Rogoff, 2003)

### **Literature on Cultural Change**

The third area is literature about cultural change. “Culture” is a word with numerous definitions. By 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhorn had found one hundred sixty-four definitions of what anthropologists meant by culture (Wright, 1998). Therefore, I will give the definition of culture I will use in this study. I will often use the term a “way of living” rather than “culture” but will define “culture” in this work as a way of living accepted by a group of people which entails a set of common understandings demonstrated in their acts and artifacts (Redfield, 1944). This means culture is considered to be in two places at the same time: inside a person’s head as understandings and in the external environment as act and artifact. Culture is also considered more as a predicate than a subject noun. In this sense culture is change, meaning it encompasses its own capacity for change (Bohanan, 1995; Rogoff, 2003; Wright, 1998).

In order to understand how a cultural system works as it changes, it is important to look at its dynamics. In anthropological literature, cultural change is said to happen because of changes in the natural environment or through human

actions. Bohanan (1995), who has written extensively on cultural change, divides cultural change into two categories: change by increment which is relatively slow, called development, and change by disaster which can result from many external causes including events in the physical environment like earthquakes, biological events like epidemics and social events like revolution or conquest. Such external disasters can make permanent changes which limit human choices.

Cultural change was not commonly studied by early anthropologists who looked at cultures as stable. In the early 1930's anthropologists became more aware of the impact of Western conquest on the non-Western world and also began paying attention to the existence of contradictory elements within a culture which are not noticed because each is kept in a separate compartment of people's lives. Also in the 1930's studies began to focus on acculturation and culture contact, and after WWII "development" studies related to the "Third World" became common. Since the 1990's, as globalization has progressed, anthropologists along with those in other disciplines have been looking closely at how culture works, especially how it adapts to new situations and how people in a society navigate these changes (Ames & Hershock, 2005; Apple, Kenway & Singh, 2007; Bohanan, 1995; McMichael, 1996; Sachs, 2008). However, there are still many unanswered questions about culture change which are said to need more detailed cross-cultural studies for their resolution (Bohanan, 1995 ; Hall, 1976; Jen, 2002; Rogoff, 2003).

I cannot cover all the literature on cultural change but will focus on a particular aspect of it. The aspect of cultural change I am most interested in is related to how

individuals and groups move among social and cognitive structures when different ways of living come into contact, particularly when there is a conscious effort to create a new way of living from elements of people's original culture and those of the other culture(s) they have had contact with. I have called this process navigation. This is in distinction to the mixing of the elements of two or more cultures in a somewhat haphazard form called hybridity (Clifford, 1997).

In some sense, this type of navigation to create a holistic culture shared by all members of a society does not usually happen in large-scale democratic societies. In these societies each person makes lifestyle choices which may be very different than those of his or her neighbors. In this situation dissonance is part of the structure of the culture which has a respect for diversity protected by law. Individuals still have to do some type of navigation between social structures but cannot create a new holistic culture for the society but only for themselves or a sub-group within the whole society although there are sometimes people who try (Bohanan, 1995). The one area which a large-scale society often does attempt to make uniform is the public education system which creates a kind of "Western-schooling culture" (Graff, 1986; Rogoff, 2003). When this Western schooling system spreads to other places, homogenization is said to establish itself (Prakash & Esteva, 1998). Hall (1976) saw the Western bureaucratic education system being exported as a complete package and being very difficult to change once it was established anywhere due to the "basic inertial stability" of such bureaucratic education systems.

### **Terms Used for Process of Navigation of Change**

There are some other terms in the literature which discuss this navigation process. Two terms used by Babcock (1986) to describe the navigation process of an individual are reinventing and regeneration. The individual is Helen Cordero, a Choctiti Pueblo woman, who makes pottery figurines which are adaptations of the Traditional Singing Mother figurine combined with Christian nativity figurines. She consciously combined elements of the two ways of life in an integrated form and can clearly articulate that process. Her work is accepted by both tribal peoples and Anglos as a new form of art which has a structure that shows the relationship between past and future. A similar process is extended from an individual like Cordero to the whole group of Native Americans by Hopi engineer and artist Al Qoyawayma who speaks of Native Americans today as having a foot in two worlds but living one life (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

Another term used for this navigation process for societies as well as individuals is recontexting. In the view of Bohanan (1995), whenever people of different cultural traditions come together, there are two sets of ideas which can come into conflict. If there is a great deal of incongruence between the ideas, people experience discomfort. In the presence of this dissonance created by new information, people can respond by ignoring and denying the information or fighting to do away with it, both of which can result in “cultural traps” or lock-ins. However, they can also make another choice: to bring the old ideas and new ideas into a single system. This last option takes a great deal of creativity and is called recontexting.

This recontexting in order to create a culture tailor-made for a specific situation is considered to be difficult because it is not easy to control unconscious premises while examining all the possibilities in a situation. The major problem is getting those unconscious premises into awareness so they can be held in suspension while the situation is examined in a new light. This takes courage to overcome unconscious fears. Another difficulty is that all the interconnections of culture may not be seen until after having already embarked upon one course of action or another. A “trained” intuition is considered helpful in this process, meaning getting used to looking for premises, growing more comfortable with the counterintuitive without ceasing to question it, and casting social problems into the same terms as technological problems while staying fully aware of the subtle differences between the way physical principles work and the way culture works. It is also considered important to remember that culture cannot be tightly controlled by humans who can only try to understand how it works and figure out how to live with it (Bohanan, 1995).

The literature also discusses a way of looking at how societies and their institutions as complex living systems are able to navigate this process of creative change in works using the term “open-ended robustness” (Jen, 2002). Research connected to the Santa Fe Institute is currently being done on the response of societies to perturbations during times of cultural change in relationship to robustness rather than just stability. Robustness is related to the fitness of the set of strategic options open to the system; the capability of the system to switch among

multiple functionalities; and the incorporation of mechanisms for learning, problem-solving and creativity. The questions being considered in this research are about how these elements are involved in creating a cultural system that is endowed with creative robustness. This is important for those involved in creating a new way of living which allows them to maintain their traditional values while changing some of the forms of their society. This concept is related to Gregory Bateson's (1972) view of the importance of diversity in maintaining flexibility and resilience (Bateson, M.C., 2000). In his view, freedom and flexibility in regard to the basic variables are considered to be necessary during the process of creating a new system by social change (Bateson, G.,1972).

Other expressions for the navigation process are given by Rogoff (2003) as the phrase "creative combinations" and the dynamic cultural process of "building on more than one way." In this view culture change is looked at in relation to human development, paying special attention to the cultural changes accompanying the introduction of Western schooling. The positive potential of "creative combinations" is emphasized along with the importance of avoiding both deficit models and romanticized images in thinking of cultural change. Cultural practices of different communities are not seen as mutually exclusive where people must switch from one to another. Instead connections among different cultural patterns can serve as the impetus for creative development of new cultural ways. This involves consideration of ways practices already fit together organically and how they can be adapted as part of a living system to new circumstances and ideas. Research has shown that this

type of “creative combination” is beneficial for individual children in the West. Those who are encouraged to understand the dynamics among communities, to value their own background and to learn how to function in two or more cultural systems are more confident and successful (Garcia Coll, et al, 1996; Phiney & Rotheram, 1987).

### **Western Schooling and Culture Change**

Examples are presented in the literature of this process related to the combining of the practices of traditional cultures with Western schooling. The introduction of Western schooling into other cultures beginning with colonization is seen as both gain and loss (Rogoff, 2003). Ball (1983) and Serpell (1993) write about how schooled youth in Africa often lose their mother tongue and way of life as well as ending up with no job. The increase in schooled people competing for available jobs has led to a mass of alienated, unemployed young people in the major cities of Africa. Similar to what happened with other traditional cultures, schooling was not introduced in Africa with a holistic view of how it would fit with the local situation but done to civilize people into what Westerners consider the “One Best Way” of education although non-Western communities have long had their own forms of formal education with traditional methodologies, such as religious schooling, apprenticeship and initiation lessons (Reagan, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). The “literacy myth” which asserts that the introduction of alphabetic literacy and Western schooling will automatically result in economic growth, good moral character and participatory democracy has not been substantiated by empirical research or stood up

to conceptual probing (Farrell, in press; Graff, 2007).

The fact that cultural processes work in organic ways interrelating as living phenomena not as mechanical objects has often been overlooked when Western schooling is introduced to a society. This is pointed out in relation to the negative effects for aboriginal people in Australia (Seagrim, 1977) and Native Americans (Highwater, 1995) as well as those already mentioned in Africa. In Mexico among the Triqui people Western education has resulted in the ignorance of the youth of the local agricultural culture without the provision of other ways of making a living while staying connected to their families and traditions (Prakash & Esteva, 1998). This loss aspect from the introduction of Western education due to the difficulties a traditional society has when trying to maintain its own values while interacting with the highly standardized Western education system is emphasized in a statement related to the advancement of Western education which is said to result in a situation in which a “global monoculture spreads like an oil slick over the entire planet” (Prakash & Esteva, 1998, p. 7).

Some of the negative effects of Western schooling have already been documented in literature related to schools in the U.S. but ignored when the model is disseminated. This includes literature on the loss of internal motivation seen to occur in children after they spend time in Western schooling. Western schooling is mainly based upon extrinsic motivation with students being urged to perform for some external reward rather than the satisfaction of the learning activity itself. However, the use of external motivators in learning has been shown to decrease intrinsic

motivation and creative thinking (Ames& Ames, 1984; Covington, 1992; Gentilucci, 2001; Wilson, 1993). The willingness to invest in a learning activity has been shown to depend upon the subjective meaning to the learner rather than external rewards ( Maehr, 1984; Weinstein, 1983). This is consistent with the literature on adult learning showing the importance of meaning and self-direction for adult students (Brookfield, 1995; Kasworm, 2003; Knowles, 1984).

### **Positive Cases of Combining Traditional and Western Schooling**

There have been a few positive cases where elements of a traditional society have been combined with compatible elements of Western schooling without the loss of connection to family and traditional values. The benefit of combining multiple methods of instruction, each with its own validity and strengths, so that all sides gain from their use in a balanced way, is acclaimed by Pablo Chavajay (1993), a scholar who grew up in a Mayan community in Guatemala.

Two examples of this type of integrated education in San Pedro, Guatemala are presented by Rogoff (2003). Retired elementary school principal Don Miguel Angel Bixcul Garcia, an indigenous Guatemala Mayan, attempted to practice this type of integration of the old and the new in education in San Pedro. He explained that this was made easier for him by the fact that San Pedro, in contrast to other Mayan towns, has a long-standing characteristic across centuries of openness to new ways without giving up the old. Another educator in San Pedro who is a teacher of Mayan descent is Don Agapito Cortez Penelu. He had only a few years of formal education himself, but he taught Spanish to elementary students using teaching methods he

developed himself. These were compatible with the children's Mayan background. He was allowed to wear traditional Mayan dress even though other teachers were required to wear suits and ties and was given a national award for teaching excellence at his retirement. Many of his students have also become teachers in San Pedro. Some wear traditional clothing and others Western dress, but all share their pride in their Mayan heritage, continuing to speak Mayan as they fluently help others learn Spanish and English.

Another positive example of a situation where elements of a traditional society have been combined with compatible elements of Western schooling without the loss of connection with family and traditional values is the Total Literacy Program in the state of Kerala in southern India. Kerala is an area with a low per capita income and a history of social movements developed decades ago to educate and organize the people to address the caste system. Some form of literacy and schooling was historically available to members of all castes, including women. The literacy program began in 1989 with the cooperation of government and non-government agencies. The goal was literacy in all areas of life and all subject matters related to the interests and backgrounds of the people involved. Literacy was seen as a platform for collective thought and action, a uniting force, a cultural process and a beginning for lifelong education and a learning society. There were 300,000 volunteer teachers and 3,000,000 learners, 65-70% of both being women. The teaching was mainly done through using existing cultural tools of festivals and caravans. As of 2005, Kerala had a 91% literacy rate. It also has a low infant

mortality rate, falling birth rate, increasing life expectancy rate and high voting rate (Burke& Ornstein, 1995; Kumar, 2007; Le Page, R. B., 1997).

Several other examples of the successful adapting of elements of Western schooling to particular local needs and cultural values are presented in the literature. These programs are child-centered rather than driven by teacher pedagogy, have multi-graded classrooms with continuous progress learning, heavy parent and community involvement, and locally adapted changes in the school day or school year. Four of the main examples of this type of schooling in the literature are: Escuela Nueva in Colombia, the Non-formal Primary Education Program of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the Community Schools Program of UNICEF – Egypt, and School for Life in Ghana (Farrell, In press).

Another example of a small educational program which successfully combines elements of modern and scientific ways of living is the Innu Nation Environmental Guardians program in northern Canada. Young Innu hired as Guardians work with government and university researchers on environmental protection. They are trained in modules that fit the local time frame and give them competencies that reflect both the Innu traditional environmental knowledge and Western scientific and technical knowledge related to environmental protection (Sable, 2005).

The benefits of combining both ways of learning are also described in the literature for the U.S. A study of Mexican immigrant families to the U.S. showed they were able to borrow school-related practices for those types of activities while keeping what was important to them in their own cultural system in family matters

(Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Cross-fertilization of educational ideas was presented as being of value for change in Western schools and middle class families as well. In this kind of restructuring of schools, students engage in integrated projects of intrinsic interest to class members. They also participate in different types of learning methodologies which can broaden their skills in different areas (Heath, 1989; Kasten, 1992; Lipka, 1998; Rogoff, et al, 2001).

Another positive example in the U.S. is the creation of Native American College High Schools in which students complete both high school and two years of free college education. The curriculum incorporates Native American cultural materials as well as college level courses and is conducted through cooperation between tribal leaders, colleges or universities, and community and public school leaders. These schools have had success in increasing high school completion and college going rates in a way that allows Native American students to stay connected to their tribal communities (Antioch College Seattle website, 2009).

One other example in the literature. related to adolescents in the U.S. involves combining elements of personalized, student-centered learning with the standardized, group-centered focus of much secondary schooling. Some of the secondary schools which are models for personalized learning are Thayer and Souhegan High Schools in New Hampshire and the Gailer School and Montpelier High School in Vermont. Much of the research and teacher training related to this work are being done by the Education Alliance of Brown University. Teachers for these schools are trained and given the supports to “draw parallels” between

students' interests and the content standards they must reach (DiMartino, Clark, & Wolk, 2003). Students who are helped to personalize their learning have been shown to develop the ability to incorporate new words and ideas as they converse with others, to hold their own views while encouraging the views of others, and to deal well with change (Friedrichs, 2000).

### **Cognitive Aspects of Navigation**

Nearly all the literature on culture change which I have mentioned speaks about a type of thinking or mental processing necessary to be able to create a new way of living from elements of more than one culture when different cultures come into contact. In addition to the terms I mentioned as describing this type of navigation, certain other words describing the type of thinking needed are continually repeated: awareness, conscious selection or choice, creativity, flexibility, integration, and self-awareness (Babcock, 1986; Bohannan, 1995; Chavajay, 1993; Hall, 1976; Rogoff, 2003 ).

This type of thinking entails understanding the premises of one's own culture as well as those of another culture. This topic has been dealt with by much of anthropological literature not just that dealing with culture change. Much has been written about how to bring one's own hidden cultural premises into awareness so that these do not affect one's perception of the actions and beliefs of those from another culture. This is considered difficult to accomplish in the abstract but needs to be done in a real-life situation where one makes contact with a different culture. Cultures are wholes so the anthropologist has to know how all the major systems of

both function and are interrelated. This means it is not possible to adequately describe a culture solely from the inside or the outside without reference to the other (Hall, 1976; Mead, 1942). In a contact situation, when an awareness of some kind of difference or a “rich point” arises, the anthropologist then needs to respond by looking at his or her own cultural assumptions in order to be able to see the situation from the perspective of members of the other culture (Agar, 1999; Bohannan, 1995; Hall, 1976; Hoffman, 1997). Understanding and participating in this practice would be beneficial for those working to create a new way of living by combining elements from two or more cultures.

There is another type of related literature which describes a similar type of thinking necessary to stop environmental destruction which threatens the continued existence of human life. Although this does not deal with national or ethnic cultures, in a sense it does involve creating a new way of living by combining elements of traditional and modern cultures. This creation involves combining the recognition of the interconnectedness of organism and environment which is typically a part of traditional cultures with an awareness of both the value and dangers of the technologies humans have created in what are called modern cultures (Bowers, 1997).

One of the key words related to the kind of thinking that is considered to be needed is again flexibility. Others are: combining, conscious intuition, conscious selection, diversity, interconnectedness, and self-observation. In this literature it is asserted that the most important task in developing this new way of living is to learn

to think in a new way which does not separate intellect and emotion or mind and body but has bridges being built between the levels of mental process: conscious, unconscious, and external or environment which is also seen as part of mind (Bateson, G., 1972). It is suggested that the innate flexibility of the human brain can be used to make the changes necessary for this type of thinking. This thinking involves self-observation which can enhance the capacity for conscious selection and conscious intuition which is the faculty that can be used to select the right part of the mind for a particular task (Ornstein, 1991). The most valuable skills for this type of thinking are considered to be the ability to connect, to think imaginatively, to understand how data are related and to assess its social effect before releasing a machine-generated innovation on society (Burke & Ornstein, 1995).

Further discussion of this type of thinking and the need for it in creating a sustainable way of living is found in the literature of the integrated university movement (Awbrey & Awbrey, 2001; Gregorian, 2004; Scott, 2005; Zanjoc, 2003). The importance of this type of thinking is also considered essential for understanding and participating in complex social interactions by those involved in the “post-modern” curriculum movement which is often associated with the “New Sciences” of complexity (Doll, 1993; Fleener, 2005; Reynolds, S., 2005; Stanley, 2005).

Most of the literature mentioned considers the capacity for intuition and integrative thinking as innate in humans and sees it as needing to be developed through education. Additional literature related to awareness/perception/intuition training has been discussed in the section on traditional learning methodologies or

“literacies”. Some literature focuses on the gaining of the capacity for this type of creative integrative thinking as being part of the adult development process. The traditional Inuit image of the ideal mature person is one involved in a lifelong process of growth as he or she lives in the community and environment. This value has often not been understood by Westerners who have held traditional people to static cultural models, but in traditional societies mature people are considered to be those who are able to modify cultural practices to incorporate new elements while still retaining essential traditional values (Stairs, 1996). Additional discussion of the view of creative thinking being related to maturity in traditional societies will be done in later sections.

A Western model of adult development with a similar image of adult maturity involving the capacity for the flexible thinking necessary to create a new way of living from elements of different ways of living is presented by Robert Kegan (1994). He sees three levels of adult development which are related to what one makes subject (identity and standard for navigating in the world) and object. The first level makes concrete objects and facts as well as one’s personal point of view object while subject includes abstractions, role consciousness, mutual reciprocity and self-consciousness. The second level of development makes object the subject of the first and makes subject of abstract systems, multiple role-consciousness and self-authorship. The third level makes object the subject of the second and makes subject of the dialectical, interpenetration of self and other, and self-transformation.

The cognitive operation of the first level is considered to be inference, that of

the second is seen as formulation and that of the third is seen as reflection upon formulation. This latter capacity is the type of thinking already discussed which enables one to move beyond identification with one culture to take elements or formulations of more than one way of living to create a new way of living which recognizes the interconnectedness of all life. Sometimes these three levels are equated in this view with traditionalism, modernism and post-modernism with the assumption being that one must pass through each one to the next level of development. However, as mentioned, some traditional cultures consider their model of mature thinking to be similar to the third “post-modern” level. This leaves open the question of whether all people have to pass through what Westerners consider modernism or if there are other developmental paths that can help one acquire the capacities needed for this creative type of navigation. This issue will be considered further later in this work when I look at whether those educated only or first in non-Western methodologies have been able to do this creative kind of navigation.

## **Chapter Three**

### **HISTORY AND GOVERNMENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF BHUTAN**

#### **Physical Description of Bhutan**

Bhutan is a small landlocked nation located in the eastern Himalayas between India and the Tibetan region of China. The area of Bhutan is about 46,600 square kilometers or 18,000 square miles, which is approximately the size of Switzerland. Bhutan stretches about 190 miles from east to west and 90 miles from north to south. Bhutan has numerous rivers and streams which flow from north to south. These rivers are not navigable but transport logs in summer and generate hydroelectric power, some of which is sold to India. (Dogra, 1990).

Geographically Bhutan can be divided into three zones: the foothills, the central belt, and the highlands. The foothills are in the south with an altitude of 3,000 feet or less and a hot and humid climate. The vegetation is very dense with mostly tropical deciduous forest found there. The central belt consists mainly of several mountain valleys with the altitude varying from 3,000 to 10,000 feet. Temperate coniferous forests grow in these valleys which have moderate rainfall. The northern zone comprises Himalayan mountain ranges and passes. The mountain passes are covered by snow throughout the year with the valleys and passes used for grazing sheep and yaks during the summer. The altitude varies from 10,000 to 24,000 feet (Dorji, C.T.,1995).

## **Population and Languages of Bhutan**

Although estimates of the population vary widely, the official population of Bhutan as of the 2005 census stands at 634,972 including foreign nationals, with 552,996 being Bhutanese citizens. Approximately 59% of the population is under twenty-four years of age. In many areas of the country, families are matriarchal, and the status of women in society has traditionally been high (Ezechieli, 2003; Norberg-Hodge, 1991). Thimphu with a population of 100,000 is the only large city. Seventy percent of the population still lives off cultivation and livestock rearing on only 7.8% of the arable land. This percentage has been decreasing since the mid-1980's with the development of a middle class which consists mainly of civil servants and business people and since the mid-1990's with an increase in workers in the private tertiary sector which receives incentives from the government. The GNP was \$1,321 per year as of 2005 (Pommaret, 2007).

There are nineteen languages in Bhutan with four main language groups: Central Bodish, East Bodish, Bodic languages of the Tibeto-Burman family, and an Indo-Aryan language (van Driem, 1994). The nineteen languages can be further divided into dialects by the major river valleys that run north – south through the country. There is a great deal of overlap between the languages of Bhutan, all of which are living languages. The main languages have lexical overlaps of 41% to 92% (Ethnologue, 2005). There are regionally dominant languages and two official languages: the national language of Dzongkha and English (Wangchuk, 2000). Dzongkha was mainly an oral language prior to 1971 when there was a

standardization of its spelling and grammar. However, there are some ancient songs and stories in Dzongkha which show that the original written form of Dzongkha evolved during the seventeenth century. It was chosen as the national language because it was the most established Bhutanese language and the only Tibeto-Burman Bhutanese language that had any written form. Until 1971 the major written language in Bhutan was Chokey, the classical Tibetan religious language (Gyatso, 2002).

### **Pre-history and Early History of Bhutan**

Little archaeological excavation has been done in Bhutan, but stone implements found on the surface of the ground indicate the country was inhabited at least by 2000 B.C. The population of Bhutan consists of several ethnic groups (Aris, 1994). When looking at the early history and origins of the people of Bhutan, most historians write about obscurity and myth as they lament the lack of written sources. The current model which is commonly presented is that the original peoples of Bhutan were of Mongoloid or Indo-Mongoloid origin with the answers to the questions of when they arrived and where they migrated from still unclear. Then around the ninth century C.E. large groups of Tibetan immigrants, possibly soldiers, settled in Bhutan, taking control and intermarrying with some or forcing out other indigenous groups. Finally, groups of Nepalis began settling in the south of Bhutan in the late nineteenth century (Aris, 1979; Dogra, 1990; Dorji, C.T., 1995; Wangchuk, 2000). This “empty land” model is not claimed by any particular scholar and has been contested. This model is said to ignore the area’s prehistoric era, to

have elements of it which are deliberately constructed for reasons of legitimizing power, and to contradict popular folk history (Wangchuk, 2000). Clifford's (1997) model of layered hybridity is proposed by Wangchuk (2000) to better explain Bhutan's early history. In this view Paleolithic peoples dispersed east and west from the upper reaches of the Yellow River in China, moving from the current day Yunnan province to Bhutan (Marshall, 1997; Ross, 1990; Wangchuk, 2000). Records also show that later movement into Bhutan was not only from Tibet but also from refugee princes from India. Wangchuk (2000) concludes that what is suggested by the evidence is that the current identities of the various ethnic groups in Bhutan are a "complexity of layers upon layers of history."

All models of Bhutanese history do recognize the great impact of the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism into Bhutan. The political history of Bhutan is closely intertwined with its religious history (Rose, 1977). According to Bhutanese tradition, the history of Bhutan began in the seventh century A.D. when the Tibetan King Sangsten Gampo constructed the first two Buddhist monasteries in the country. In the eighth century Padmasambhava, more commonly known as Guru Rimpoche, from Swat in present day Pakistan introduced Tantric Buddhism to Tibet and Bhutan where an animistic religion close to the old Tibetan Bon beliefs had been practiced. Buddhism became the state religion, but the old practices were sometimes combined with Buddhism which still occurs today (Chhoki, 1994; Dorji, N, 2008, personal conversation; Hargens, 2002). There are few written records for the ninth and tenth centuries, but as was mentioned previously, due to political turmoil it

seems that a number of people, including soldiers and members of the ruling class, fled from Tibet to Bhutan. From the eleventh to the sixteenth century, several different schools of Buddhism came into being in Tibet and then moved into Bhutan (Pommaret, 2007). From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century there was ongoing conflict between different Buddhist sects (Rose, 1977).

Political unity was not established in Bhutan until 1651 when Ngonwang Namgyal took the title of Zhabdrung and established a dual system of government with a state clergy under a religious leader, the Khenpo (Chief Abbot), and a political system administered by monks under a temporal chief, the Desi. There were also three regional governors or penlops. This dual system of government was to be united in the person of the Zhabdrung. Namgyal also gave the country a legal system based on Buddhist moral principles and customs of the time (Dorji, C.T., 1995; Pommaret, 2007; Ura, 2008).

This theocratic form of government with reincarnations of the Zhabdrung serving as head of state continued for two and a half centuries. After the death of the first Zhabdrung, there were many power struggles among the Desi, the penlops, and local leaders with the Zhabdrung's successors often concerned mainly with spiritual power and having little experience with temporal rule (Pommaret, 2007)..

Bhutan had foreign relations only with neighboring countries until the expansion of the British into the Himalayas in the middle of the eighteenth century. Bhutan was never colonized by the British, partly because its mountain passes were difficult to traverse so did not make British territory vulnerable to a threat from China. The

British did establish positive trade relationships with Bhutan. However, there was hostility over the control of the narrow southern plain, the Duars, from the 1830's until a peace treaty was signed in 1865. Bhutan gave up the strip of land and in exchange received an annuity from the British since much of the revenue of Bhutan had come from the Duars (Crossette, 1995; Dogra, 1990; Dorji, C.T., 1995). Although Britain did exercise power over Bhutan in such cases, the British had limited physical presence in Bhutan and even gave up plans in the first decade of the twentieth century to build a road from India to Tibet through Bhutan and instead built it through Sikkim which allowed Bhutan to maintain itself in isolation for another half century (Rose, 1977).

### **Establishment of the Bhutanese Monarchy**

During the second half of the nineteenth century the progressive weakening of the central government in Bhutan contributed to the emergence of the two main penlops or governors, the one in Paro controlling western Bhutan and the one in Trongsa controlling central and eastern Bhutan. Through a network of alliances, the penlop of Trongsa became the main leader in Bhutan after 1865. His son Ugyen Wangchuk became governor in 1881, strengthening his position and favoring increased cooperation with the British while the governor of Paro took an anti-British stance. Wangchuk served as an intermediary in negotiations between the Tibetans and the British, being awarded the title of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire in 1905. On December 17, 1907, Ugyen Wangchuk was elected to be King of Bhutan, the head of a hereditary monarchy, by an assembly of representatives of

the monastic community, civil servants, and the public (Aris, 1994; Dogra, 1990; Dorji, C.T., 1995; Pommaret, 2007).

Although Bhutan was still isolated from much of the world, the first King was himself quite knowledgeable about the broader world. Such has continued to be the case with his successors after him. The monarchy in Bhutan has taken the lead in making connections to the broader world in ways that are conducive to the Bhutanese way of life (Mathou, 1999). This is consistent with the already mentioned view that in traditional societies mature people are considered to be those who are able to modify cultural practices to incorporate new elements while still retaining essential traditional values. Ugyen Wanchuk ruled until 1926 when he was succeeded by his son Jigme Wanchuk who ruled until his death in 1952. The reigns of the first two kings were basically times of political stability and some degree of economic prosperity after the previous years of internal conflict. There was some movement to open the country more to the outside world. Aid from Great Britain provided for sending the first Bhutanese students to India for advanced training and for the establishing of a few Western style public schools (Pommaret, 2007). By the end of the reign of the second king, Britain's Asian empire had collapsed, and four new nations had been created with India's political aspirations posing some problems for Bhutan, Sikkim, and Nepal, the three Himalayan kingdoms that had never been colonized (Crossette, 1995).

Ruling from 1952 – 1972, the third king Jigme Dorji Wangchuk is considered the father of the nation of Bhutan. Recognizing that Bhutan had to end its political

isolation in order to survive in the changing world, he began the modern development of Bhutan. During the 1950's he abolished serfdom, redistributed land, and established the National Assembly. With the help of the leader of India, he launched the first five-year plan of development with a particular emphasis on road building. During his reign many immigrants came from Tibet to Bhutan due to the Chinese invasion of Tibet, the first monastic institute for lay people was founded, and a movement was started to expand the development of Western style public schools (Pommaret, 2007). Further discussion on the history of education in Bhutan will be done later in this chapter.

### **Recent History and Current Situation of Bhutan**

After spending some time in boarding schools in England, Jigme Singye Wangchuk became the fourth king at the age of seventeen when his father died in 1972. He continued his father's policy of supporting socio-economic development for the country while also maintaining its traditional values and cultural traditions. He expanded diplomatic relations with Asian and European countries, and during his reign Bhutan became a member of numerous international organizations (Mathou, 1999; Pommaret, 2007).

In 1988, the fourth king married the four sisters with whom he had been living for a decade and with whom he had eight children. The four queens have been active in supporting organizations for educational and cultural preservation. During the reign of the fourth king, a compulsory national dress code for Bhutanese citizens was adopted and is still in effect to some degree at least for formal occasions and school

children. This consists of a kimono like gho for males and an ankle-length kira for females (Crossette, 1995). On my visit to Bhutan I observed most people wearing some form of traditional dress but also saw a number of Bhutanese wearing Western clothing, especially on the weekends in Thimphu where a number of discount shops sell Western clothing.

Also during the reign of the fourth king, Bhutan had to face what is referred to as “the southern problem,” related to the Nepali-speaking settlers in the south of Bhutan. There was a minor revolt of these settlers in 1953, but the third king forgave the offenders and gave Bhutanese citizenship to all Nepalese nationals residing in Bhutan in 1958. However, there continued to be a problem with illegal immigrants coming through the porous southern border. Although there was some resistance from conservative northern Bhutanese, the government focused on raising the living standard in the south where many of the country’s small industries such as cement-making and fruit-processing were created in order to be more accessible to roads and ports and in hopes of improving the political situation. Since Bhutan provided free schooling and health care to all citizens, many illegal immigrants continued to enter the country while at the same time rebels did their best to destroy the factories, schools, and clinics the government had built (Pommaret, 2007; Rose, 1977). Using democratic, anti-monarchical language, the rebels charged Bhutan with the mass murders of protesters. However, later investigations showed that only one person had been accidentally killed when police shot into the air (Mathou, 1999; Pommaret, 2007).

In the 1990's there was an enforcement of the law on nationality which judged residents to be Bhutanese who had proof of Bhutanese citizenship before 1958 and also their direct descendants. This led to a displacement of populations of Nepalese origin who had settled in Bhutan after that time. Refugee camps were set up near the border of Nepal while negotiations took place. There has been heated debate about how many of the people in the camps were actually from Bhutan since there were major movements of population, some of Nepalese origin, that took place at the end of the 1980's in the whole eastern region of India (Mathou, 1999; Pommaret, 2007). The number of refugees said to be from Bhutan was 6,000 at the end of 1991, the year the conflict broke out. Numbers soared to 100,000 by 2000. As a result of the negotiations between Bhutan and Nepal, a Joint Verification Team was sent to the camps. Typical of their findings, the verification of 12,183 residents of Khudunabari camp by the team revealed that only 293 were forcefully evicted from Bhutan with 8,595 having emigrated voluntarily, 347 fleeing after criminal activity, and 2,948 having no links to Bhutan. Some refugees remain in camps, but many of them have now been resettled in Nepal and in Western countries after negotiations between Bhutan and Nepal and several international agencies (Phuntsho, 2006).

Other changes in Bhutan under the fourth king were the introduction of tourism in 1974 and the privatization of the government-run tourism industry in 1991. The latter provided for continued government regulation of many aspects of tourism but allowed private investment in hotels, restaurants and tourism companies. Bhutan was closed to tourism until 1974 when 287 tourists were allowed to visit. The

primary objectives for the introduction of tourism were generating of revenue (especially foreign exchange), publicizing the country's unique culture and traditions to the outside world and contributing to the country's socio-economic development (Dorji, L., 2001). The government regulation of tourism is intended to accomplish these objectives in a way that limits negative impacts on Bhutan's pristine environment and rich culture and also recognizes the lack of infrastructure and tourist facilities as well as the rugged terrain. The number of tourists coming to Bhutan has increased from approximately 7,000 in 1999 to approximately 17,000 in 2006. All tourists must come through a government-licensed tour operator which charges all tourists a daily package fee with a minimum of \$200 per day and increasing for smaller group sizes. The package includes hotels, meals, guides, transportation and entrance fees (Pommaret, 2007).

Another aspect of opening up to the world under the fourth king was the introduction of television and the internet to Bhutan in 1999. There has been a great deal of discussion about the effect of the media on Bhutanese youth and how to use technology to promote healthy development in Bhutan (Phuntsho, 2007). The fourth king also initiated political reform and a philosophy of development based on Gross National Happiness. This philosophy will be discussed in the next section after a discussion of the changes in the governmental structure.

On June 10, 1998 the fourth king issued a royal edict on administrative decentralization which resulted in the transfer of administrative responsibilities from the king to a council of ministers whose members were elected for a 5-7 year term by

the National Assembly. Full executive powers moved from the king who was no longer the head of the government but still remained the head of state (Schappi, 2004). In 2001 under the leadership of the fourth king, work began on drafting Bhutan's first written constitution. The process continued under the guidance of the Constitution Drafting Committee, and it was signed by the current king and designated representatives of the people on July, 18, 2008 (Bhutan Observer, July 2008).

In December 2005 the fourth king announced that he would relinquish his throne in favor of his son Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk. He took over as the fifth king in December 2006, and his official coronation occurred in November 2008. He has continued to work on the process begun by his father of the transition to a democratic form of government, including the first general elections for Parliament. Under the new governance framework, the Parliament includes the monarch as head of state, an elected National Council serving as the upper house with one member from each of the country's twenty districts and five appointees of the king, and the National Assembly made up of forty-seven members belonging to the two political parties which received the highest and second highest number of votes in the preliminary round of elections. The elections for the members of the National Council were held in December 2007 and January 2008. The election for the members of the National Assembly was held on March 24, 2008 while I was in Bhutan. The voter turnout was nearly 80%. The president of the Druk Pheunsun Tshogpa party which won forty-five out of forty-seven seats became prime minister, and a ten-member cabinet

with five of its members having been ministers under the previous regime was sworn in on April 9, 2008 (ADB website, 2008).

### **Philosophy of Governance**

The changes made in the Bhutanese form of government by the monarchy are part of a conscious vision of the proper form of development for Bhutan based on the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). In 1972 the term was introduced by the fourth King as a teenage monarch speaking to an American newspaper. Since the 1980's the Bhutanese government has stated their goal to increase GNH rather than to pursue only economic growth measured by a higher Gross National Product (GNP). GNH is based upon four pillars: cultural promotion, equitable economic development, good governance, and environmental conservation (Bhutan RGOB, 1999; Ura, 2008). Maximizing GNH is considered to be a unifying concept for development that enables Bhutanese leaders to identify future directions that are preferred above all others. The government has defined its goal for growth as follows:

Our approach to development has been shaped by the beliefs and values of the faith we have held for more than 1,000 years. Firmly rooted in our rich tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, the approach stresses, not material rewards, but individual development, sanctity of life, compassion for others, respect for nature, social harmony, and the importance of compromise....(Our goal is) to achieve a balance between peljor gongphel (economic development) and gakid (happiness and peace). When tensions were observed between them, we have deliberately chosen to give preference to our understanding of happiness and peace, even at the expense of economic growth (Bhutan PC, 1999, p.23).

Although GNH is a new term, the connection of happiness to the goals of the state has a history in Buddhism. The concept of GNH has been related to the

Buddhist concept of “the Middle Path”. This path incorporates both cultural and spiritual enhancement as well as protection of the physical environment. The latter includes a strong reverence by the Bhutanese for the nature spirits who are believed to be the protectors of the environment (Hargens, 2002; Ura, 2003). Happiness as part of the policy of a Buddhist government as in GNH is seen to have a precedent in the rationalizing of the 1729 legal code established in Bhutan after the reign of the Zhabdrung by the argument that it is not possible for sentient beings to obtain happiness without laws established by the state (Ura, 2008).

GNH has not only been connected to Buddhism but also to post-modernism in relation to a concept of multiple identities held by both. According to this view, the conflict occurring within an individual due to contradictory identities may result in meaninglessness and unhappiness especially during times of rapid cultural change such as what has occurred in Bhutan since the 1950’s. Happiness is seen as being dependent upon relationships within oneself and with others in which individual members can make meaningful contributions to each other’s welfare. When such inner conflict occurs, GNH is predicted to be low (Ura, 2007).

The concept of GNH is constantly being referred to in Bhutan and being discussed at international conferences on GNH, but it is still in a conceptually formative stage (Ura, 2007). The fourth international conference on Gross National Happiness was held in Thimphu in November 2008. The Centre for Bhutan Studies has been doing interviews for the government of all types of people in all regions of the country to determine the happiness level of the citizens of Bhutan. However,

there is no definition of “happiness” used in interviews despite the encouragement by some to create such a definition and measurable indicators for happiness (Coleman & Sagebien, 2004; Shekawat, 2005; Worcester, 2004). People were just asked to rate their level of happiness in different areas of their lives. However, now nine indicators have been developed to measure GNH: psychological wellbeing, health, education, time use and balance, community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience, ecological diversity and resilience, living standard, and good governance (Galay, 2007). These indicators as targets are said to “display our purpose and progress, helping us navigate our socio-economic journeys toward them” (Ura, 2008, p. 5). The information gathered from the GNH interviews is being analyzed so that the government can improve areas where people have low levels of happiness including education (Galay, March 21, 2008; Wangyal, March 22, 2008, personal communications).

In January 2008 the fifth king established the GNH Commission to function as the strategic body in the nation for implementing GNH, with committees at the ministerial, district, and block levels (Ura, 2008). The government is in the process of attempting to navigate the “Middle Path” of GNH as development brings the intersection of different ways of living. One area in which this navigation is taking place is the focus of this research. This is the sphere of education where Bhutanese citizens and policy makers seem to be navigating among traditional, modern and “post-modern” or global elements.

## **History and Philosophy of Education in Bhutan**

In accord with the perennial association of Buddhist practice with education, Buddhist monastic education was the earliest type of formal education in Bhutan and still exists there as an important educational system today (Ames & Hershock, 2005; Phuntsho, 2000). Although the first Buddhist monasteries were built in Bhutan in 640, formal traditional education is usually said not to have been introduced until the bringing of Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan by Guru Rinpoche in the eighth century. By that time most Buddhist literature had been translated from Sanskrit into Chokey, the language of religious and classical Tibetan. This literature was taught in Buddhist monasteries by traveling lamas and Buddhist scholars who traveled to Tibet for higher studies (Dorji, C.T., 1995). When the Zhabdrung unified Bhutan, he started the Central Monastic Body which was founded with the plan to provide formal training in Buddhist philosophy, liturgical chanting, dialectics and linguistics. That was followed by establishing several branches of monastic bodies in different regions. However, most of the branches as well as the Central Monastic Body did not provide much training in philosophy, language or dialectics but emphasized monastic arts and rituals for the monks who have to perform countless ceremonies for the state and the public. A few monks did emerge as outstanding scholars and authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Literary activity appears to have declined between the middle of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century. It is estimated that the literacy rate from the Zhabdrung's time through the reign of the second king was around fifteen percent, not including people with semi-literacy who

could read texts but not write (Phuntsho, 2000).

In the second half of the twentieth century Bhutan had a renaissance of traditional scholarship. This literary revival is attributed to several intellectual, social and political trends. The opening of Bhutan to the outside world encouraged Bhutan's intelligentsia to turn back to the country's traditional heritage (Aris, 1999). The third and the fourth kings actively promoted this literary development. In addition, the proliferation of modern education stimulated this renewed development in traditional learning as a contrast to modern education. Finally, a number of exiled Tibetan scholars left Tibet and became part of this Bhutanese renaissance with Bhutanese monks also traveling to India and Nepal to study in the academic centers established by exiled Tibetan monks (Phuntsho, 2000).

Under the supervision of some of the religious scholars, intellectual monastic colleges or schools of philosophy called shedras multiplied throughout the country to teach monks in the age range of secondary school and college. In 1961, the first such school for lay people was begun as the Semtokha Lopdra (Phuntsho, 2000; Ura, 2004). I interviewed Lungtaen Gyatso, the current director of this school, which is now part of the recently formed Royal University of Bhutan as the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies. It continues to use a traditional monastic curriculum as well as courses in English. More will be said about this school in my chapter about how educational institutions navigate the changes that come with the meeting of different ways of living.

Monastic schools still play a role in Bhutan today. Many poor families send at

least one son to a monastic school because it is completely free and its completion will result in a well-respected position in society (Bhutan Foundation Newsletter, Fall 2007; Phuntsho, 2000). Boys are usually sent to a monastery at the age of five or six where they study monastic academic courses for a few years. Then depending on their aptitude, they are directed into purely scholastic studies or into more artistic pursuits such as becoming dancers, musicians, painters and tailors. Monastic schools are very structured with a set schedule from early in the morning until 10:00 p.m. (Pommaret, 2007). I visited several monasteries and interviewed the young head (Khenpo) of one monastery and an older monk who was an administrator of another monastery. I will discuss their experiences more in my chapter on how individuals have navigated the educational structures of Bhutan in different settings and time periods.

Education in Bhutan before the introduction of Western-style schooling consisted of not only this formal monastic schooling system but also an informal system of education that involved the use of private tutors for a few, informal study with a Buddhist teacher for some, apprenticeship in the practical skills of traditional life for most, and traditional folk and religious storytelling for all. Traditional folktales have been used in Bhutan for transmission of generational values and for entertainment for centuries with most Bhutanese having been educated through an oral tradition of folktales (Penjore, 2004; Phuntsho, 2000; Sharma, 2007; Wangyal, 2001). As with the Sufi stories, these folktales are said to be deliberately created for teaching although they also serve as entertainment. The folktales are considered

important for inculcating traditional values and a sense of identity as well as for meeting spiritual needs (Dorji, 2002; Penjore, 2004).

This type of education was (and to some degree still is) the responsibility of the family, village elders, and lay monks. The values of the Bhutanese Buddhist way of life have been passed on to future generations through these means. There is concern that the lessening of the influence of this type of education is resulting in a loss of these values as well (Choden, 2006; Dorf, 2002; Penjore., 2004). I interviewed a number of people whose main education was in this informal system and also spoke with those attempting to incorporate these values and some of the methodologies of the informal system into the public school system. I will discuss this type of education more fully in my chapters on the navigation of educational structures in Bhutan by individuals and institutions.

### **Introduction and Current Status of Western-Style Education in Bhutan**

The first Western-style school in Bhutan was introduced during the reign of the first king. During the reign of the second king the number of schools increased to five. Hindi was the language in the earliest schools (Gyatso,2002). Formal Western-style schooling became part of the move toward development under the leadership of the third king with the establishment of eleven schools with four hundred forty students by 1959. Prior to this only a few Bhutanese had received secular formal training in the British public schools in India or private Catholic schools in India.

Modern education was initially viewed as an alien system intruding into a traditional Buddhist system by most Bhutanese so was approached with cynicism

and reluctance to submit their children to non-Buddhist heretical ideas. However, the government under the leadership of the third king continued its campaign of propagating free public school education for all children in Bhutan, and in the next few decades Bhutan saw the rapid growth of modern education. The opposition to modern schooling began to diminish as the first school graduates entered the public arena as prominent people. There was still some concern about the non-Buddhist nature of modern education, but the possible economic value of modern school education was seen very clearly as the first graduates received high status jobs (Phuntsho, 2000).

The number of public schools grew from one hundred twenty-two with twenty thousand four hundred thirty-five students in 1974 to three hundred forty-three schools with over one hundred thousand students in 2000, with only twenty-six of these schools being high schools. This was in contrast to about ten thousand students in two hundred eighty-eight monastic institutions that same year.(Phuntsho, 2000; Wangyal, 2001). Public school enrollment has continued to increase with four hundred eighty-one schools, one hundred forty-five thousand students and five thousand five hundred seventy-two teachers in 2005. In 2004 the rate of primary school enrollment was eighty-four percent with the rate of general enrollment at sixty-three percent. However, the enrollment rate in rural areas was just thirty-one percent.

Schooling in Bhutan is free but not compulsory because of distance issues in rural areas. The government did not want to oblige students to attend schools that

are several hours away (Ezechieli, 2003). The minimum entry age for public education is six. National level exams are given at level VI and level X, the latter determining access to post-basic education. Those who do not pass these exams drop out, repeat levels, apply to vocational institutes (including teacher training), or attend private schools that offer levels XI and XII. Bhutan was considered to have about a sixty percent literacy rate in 2005 (Dorji, C.T., 1995; Pommaret, 2007; Kuensel, February 2008).

The public school curriculum subjects are similar to those taught in most Western schools with the ratio of teaching in English to Dzongkha being six to two (Gyatso, 2003). In addition to these courses, a values education curriculum in English was introduced as a separate subject taught once a week at all levels in 1999. There is a heavy emphasis on modern scientific courses in the upper grades because of the belief that these courses are important for graduate studies that lead to better jobs. English is used for these courses as well as those in mathematics and geography because Dzongkha lacks the appropriate vocabulary for these subjects. English is also emphasized so that students from Bhutan can study in India and the West to obtain higher level scientific and technical degree (Bhutan MSS, 1966; Wangyal, 2001). Before the 1980's and the adoption of Dzongkha as a national language, schooling in some schools in the South was done in Nepali (Schappi, 1994).

Another reason for the limited use of Dzongkha in the schools is that Dzongkha is still in the process of becoming a fully developed written language. It was mainly

a spoken language until 1971 when serious work began to develop grammar rules and standardized spelling rules for written Dzongkha. Some textbooks have been translated from English to Dzongkha from that time (Ezechieli, 2003) Dzongkha is taught as a language course in K-12 schools, but its use in a course of traditional Buddhist stories gives it a strong value education content (Gyatso, 2002 ). I will elaborate further on the position of Dzongkha in Bhutanese schools in my chapter on the navigation process of the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies which is the only educational institution in Bhutan which teaches more courses in Dzongkha than in English.

Much funding and support for the expansion of public education in Bhutan has come from external sources with World Bank-funded projects beginning in 1988, 1998, and 2003 (Ezechieli, 2003). Teachers were brought into Bhutan for the first Western-style schools. Up until the 1980's most of the faculty at its teacher training institutes came from India. Many teachers also came from India with others coming as volunteers from Canada and Switzerland. In 1982 teachers coming from India accounted for approximately forty-three per cent of the total, and in 1990 they were forty-five per cent (Ezechieli, 2003). Many of the current lecturers in teacher training institutes received their training in the UK with a number also doing graduate work in education in Canada or Australia (Jamtsho, personal communication, July, 2008). Bhutan currently has an acute teacher shortage which is partially due to the rapid increase in number of schools and also to teaching not being considered an economically rewarding or prestigious career (Gyatso, personal

communication, March, 21, 2008; Wangyal, personal communication, March, 22, 2008). In May 2008, to deal with the teacher shortage, the Education Ministry of Bhutan began recruiting two hundred twenty-two additional graduates as temporary teachers while also reinstating some retired teachers on a contract basis and accepting more UN volunteers as teachers. The government is also considering revising stipends for temporary teachers to motivate them to work harder (Bhutan Government website, 2008).

Concern about the quality of the education system has arisen in Bhutan in recent years. The concern is about a decline in both educational standards and in traditional values. There is the already discussed teacher shortage and low quality of teachers. There are often large classes and a shortage of textbooks. There is a home/school divide in some rural areas. Only forty percent of students pass Level X exams with many dropouts. There is high youth unemployment with some problems with drugs and even violence in this population. In addition to these external problems, there is a sense among many adults that the schools are not producing the kind of citizens Bhutan desires and that schooling is too separate from everyday life, not supporting each student to develop his or her full potential and not strongly promoting traditional values (Choden, personal communication, March, 23, 2008; Dorji, C.T., 1995; Gyatso, personal communication, March, 21, 2008; Kuensel, February 2008; Wangyal, personal communication, March, 22, 2008).

In order to address these concerns a Royal Education Council (REC) was established by the fifth king in 2007 to consider the reform of the public education

system and the full establishment of a higher education system. The movement of the council is toward a more child-centered, interactive form of education which incorporates traditional values. They have chosen two models for Bhutanese schools: Riverside School and iDiscoveri Preschools in India. I personally interviewed and/or have had e-mail correspondence with several members of the council and have heard and read their formal presentations. I will discuss their work at length in the chapter on the navigation of educational structures by institutions in Bhutan .

### **Post-Secondary and Higher Education in Bhutan**

Higher education in Bhutan is still in the early stages of development. Two institutes of higher education offering courses in civil, mechanical and electrical engineering as well as in surveying and drafting were established in the 1970's: Royal Bhutan Polytechnic and Kharbandi Technical School. Sherubtse College, Bhutan's only junior college, was established in 1983 in eastern Bhutan as a three-year degree granting college affiliated with the University of Delhi. A major step in the development of higher education opportunities in Bhutan occurred with the issuing of the Royal Charter for the Royal University of Bhutan by the fourth king on April 13, 2003. The university consists of a federation of Sherubtse College, Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology, Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, Royal Institute of Management, National Institutes of Education in Samste and in Paro, National Resources Training Institute and Royal Institute of Health Sciences and National Institute of Traditional Medicines. Bhutan has an integrated medicine system in which traditionally trained and Western trained doctors work together out

of the same hospitals and coordinate treatment of patients (Dorgi, N, Personal communication, March 21, 2008.; Pommaret, 2007).

The Royal University plans to provide the first opportunities for graduate degree studies as well as the current undergraduate degrees. The university has been proclaimed an instrument of Gross National Happiness as part of Bhutan's national development. This means that it intends to not only support the country's economic development but also to draw inspiration from its spiritual traditions and serve "its nobler functions of enlightening and empowering individuals as people and not mere economic entities" (Powdyel, 2005).

Another aspect of post-high school education in Bhutan is related to the large number of unemployed youth in the country. The exam scores of nearly sixty percent of Level X students do not qualify them for the limited number of college spaces or office jobs. The private business sector is relatively underdeveloped, and the public sector has a limited number of positions. However, young people have high expectations that completion of high school will get them a high level government or other type of office job as was the case in the past when few people completed high school (Dorji, L, 2006; Kuensel, April 28, 2008). In order to deal with this situation, high schools now have career counselors available to assist students in considering different options for their future. Students still make little use of these new services, but the hope is that gradually students will see career counseling as a necessary part of the high school education process (Bhutan, PC, 2002; Khunkha, school career counselor, personal communication, March 19,

2008).

Another step that the government is taking to address this issue is to build several new vocational training institutes which offer a variety of courses, including specialization in technical skills required for the labor market. There already are a few vocational institutes in arts and crafts and performing arts. Students go to these after grade X or XII. The government is also holding regional job fairs and running an apprentice training program of national service for high school graduates before their employment (Dorji, N, personal communication, March, 28, 2008; Jamtsho, personal communication, October, 17, 2008; Kuensel, April 28, 2008).

#### **Other Literature About Education in Bhutan and Gross National Happiness**

In addition to the literature already mentioned, there is additional literature by Bhutanese and others about education in Bhutan, including some that directly discusses the relationship of education, development, and GNH. An analysis of the education sections of the Bhutanese government's Five-Year Plans since 1961 provides a good overview of how education has been seen in relationship to development planning. The first three Five-Year Plans focused mostly on the increase in the number of primary schools and students. Concern about the impact of development was seen in the provision for building museums in order to preserve Bhutanese culture and educate youth as modernization and Western schooling increased (Ezechieli, 2003). The fifth Five-Year Plan addressed the need to move toward modernization in a way that also preserved Bhutanese culture. One of its objectives is directed toward development: to bring about modernization of society

by introducing people to science and technology so they are enabled “to join the mainstream of contemporary civilization” (Bhutan MSS, 1982). The next objective focused on the need to retain Bhutanese identity and values: to preserve and promote Bhutan’s cultural and spiritual heritage so that the educated are not alienated from their tradition (Bhutan MSS, 1982). The bringing together of the two in the creation of the Bhutanese education system was addressed in the proposal for the introduction of a “strong national-cultural orientation to the educational content which is at the same time consistent with the needs of modern socio-economic systems” (Bhutan MSS, 1982).

Despite these intentions, the Western curricula that was already part of the system which had been imported from India allowed little space for traditional materials. In the seventh Five-Year Plan the Indian-based curriculum for primary education was to be revised to incorporate the history, values and local environmental specifics of the Bhutanese people while the secondary and college education levels were still based on the Indian system. The plan also included a goal to reduce the number of non-Bhutanese teachers and increase teacher training capacity (Bhutan MSS, 1992). The eighth Five-Year Plan addressed the previously mentioned problem of unrealistic expectations for office jobs for all high school graduates. The goal was for the education system to resolve the problems of overemphasis on academic education in comparison to technical and agricultural training and the rural to urban migration of youth even though the problems were acknowledged to be a reflection of wider social and economic influences. Also a

goal was set to increase female school enrollment and to incorporate more values education within the curriculum (Bhutan MSS, 1996).

The ninth Five-Year Plan directly mentioned “human happiness” as an education policy goal: A key objective of primary education was to instill values in children of the way of life “based on the principle of achieving human happiness” (Bhutan PC, 2002, p.70). This plan reiterated many of the previous goals and also promoted the expansion of guidance and career counseling and the use of new technologies in education (Bhutan, PC, 2002). The tenth Five-Year Plan is still in draft form. Some of its proposed education objectives are to help students gain skills that lay the foundation for creativity and innovation, to increase student appreciation for cultural and moral values, to improve teacher quality, and to promote life-long learning. Some of the strategies suggested are consolidation of schools in rural areas, increase in vocational institutes, smaller class sizes, and incentives and better working conditions for teachers. The draft also expresses a strong belief in the power of education to alleviate poverty (Bhutan, PC, 2008). In later chapters I will look at how these goals relate to the experiences of those I interviewed and their evaluation of success in reaching the goals.

In addition to the literature by Bhutanese officials and scholars already mentioned, I want to mention two other relevant articles. An article related to the navigation of cultural change by already cited Bhutanese scholar and national councilor Karma Ura (2007) discusses the relationship of culture, liberty, and happiness. Culture is defined as a loose set of ideas and meanings along with their

material expressions that are subject to change because of the contestation of opposing discourses. Concern is expressed that cultural change happening too fast can bring dislocation in a society where some parts of it do not meld but become antagonistic to each other. The possibility of reconciling the concepts of individual human rights and cultural liberty is presented along with a quote from Herschok (1995) about how the Middle Path of Buddhism can help in the reconciliation of these competing elements, not by finding a point of perfect balance but by abandoning the very terms of competition itself. The second article by already cited Bhutanese scholar Karma Phuntsho (2000), whom I spoke with in Bhutan, deals with the two forms of education in Bhutan: monastic and Western, both of which he has experienced. He describes himself as a bat-like scholar, having the” academic teeth of the modernist beasts as well as the spiritual wings of the traditionalist birds” (p. 19). Ways in which the varying approaches of educational modernists and traditionalists can be blended are presented.

Other relevant literature discusses the relationship of Buddhist values, education, and GNH. “Buddhist Economics” is contrasted to the dominant capitalistic approach with a discussion of the type of education required to support the Buddhist view. Economic development as carried out since WWII is seen as not having considered the social and environmental costs of growth. Education for sustainable development in poor countries is regarded as key in changing this and is said to be required to respond to four requirements. First, the education system must provide competencies that allow people to be competitive in the places where they

are already living rather than only urban areas where they tend to migrate. Second, the cost of creating those workplaces, including educational preparation, must be low enough for the formation of a large number of workplaces. Third, production methods must be relatively simple and the demand for high skills minimized. Fourth, production should be mainly from local materials and resources for local use, including educational provisioning (Ezechieli, 2003; Schumacher, 1973).

In addition, education based upon Buddhist economic principles is described as needing to produce wisdom by facilitating holistic and long-term thinking which enables children to absorb the values they need for building a sound future rather than just gaining scientific and technical skills. This would entail “education as if people mattered” (Schumacher, 1973).

The need to use Buddhist principles in creating Bhutan’s public education system is called for directly by several non-Bhutanese authors published in the *Journal for Bhutan Studies*. It is considered necessary for students to understand how their actions can create Buddhist-inspired GNH rather than morally oblivious self-indulgence (McDonald, 2005). Bhutan is also encouraged to see education for GNH as a fulfillment of the Buddhist goal of the attainment of true knowledge and wisdom for the benefit of all beings (Coleman & Sagebien, 2005). Education is said to be one of the pillars GNH must rest upon with new standards to measure the achievement of success in education based upon GNH needing to be developed. The public education system is called upon to contribute to both “Big Happiness” for the state and “Small Happiness” for individuals to develop their own learning interests

(Mancall, 2004; Okuma-Nystrom, 2008). The fundamental human need for education is seen as able to be met from a GNH perspective by having small local schools that emphasize the value of local traditions, language, crafts, mythology, philosophy, and religion and by teaching children about the negative consequences of a clever mind devoid of wisdom (Worcester, 2005).

I found two academic theses related to Bhutan. The first is a 2004 M..A. thesis in political science at the University of Zurich by Daniel Schappi which is not directly related to my topic but mainly focuses on the Nepalese immigrant issue and whether Bhutan should consider itself a culturally pluralistic country. Schappi's thesis is no longer available online, but the main points of his thesis are in a paper on the website of the Center for Comparative and International Studies.

The second thesis is more directly related to my research. It is a 2003 M. A. thesis in International Comparative Education at Stanford University by Eric Ezechieli about education for Gross National Happiness in Bhutan. His analysis of the education sections of Bhutan's Five-Year Plans has already been cited. He did not travel to Bhutan but conducted interviews by phone or internet with fourteen people who were officers in Bhutanese organizations or in international organizations working in Bhutan or considered experts in education in Bhutan. He also conducted an online survey of twenty-three people through the online Bhutanese newspaper Kuensel. The questions of both aspects of his research focused on the impact of modern Western education on the Bhutanese people, and he looked at whether this education system is seen as being in harmony with GNH goals. His

survey findings were that 74% believed mass education in Bhutan was consistent with GNH goals but only 52% found it to be effective in maintaining a balance between economy, environment, culture, and social equity. His interview findings revealed a concern about the need to reinforce values and moral education at the higher levels of public education and a concern that there is a gap between policy related to education for GNH and its actual enactment.

## **Chapter Four**

### **TRADITIONAL VALUES AS THE CENTER FOR INDIVIDUALS’ NAVIGATING EDUCATION IN BHUTAN**

This chapter will compare and contrast interview results from individuals in Bhutan who have navigated informal learning settings and formal education structures as Bhutan has experienced great social changes over the past sixty years to address these questions: What are the common characteristics of those Bhutanese trained only or first in non-Western educational methodologies? How do these characteristics hold for those receiving a Western education? In what ways do the experiences of those traditionally educated relate to the current navigation process of creating an education system in Bhutan which is aligned with GNH?

I obtained interviews from eight people whose only or first experience with education was some form of non-Western education, three people who were students in the Western education system in Bhutan but who also were participants in traditional forms of learning, and three people who were schooled mainly at Catholic schools in India but who also kept a strong connection to their Bhutanese heritage. By comparing and contrasting responses across interviews, I identified common themes from the experiences of learners within these three groups. I found more similarities than differences among the interviewees even though they had received their education in different external formats. The belief that one of the main purposes of formal learning is spiritual/moral development is common to all three groups. All also experienced strong internal motivation and often mentioned experiences with

alphabetic literacy. There were some differences related to which traditional /non-Western methodologies they experienced, but all experienced some of them. There also seem to be several aspects of their experiences that can provide insights for those creating an education system aligned with GNH.

### **Data Collection and Methodology**

As stated in the introduction, the nature of my research seemed to fit with a qualitative research methodology since I wanted to learn about the experiences of the people navigating learning in Bhutan. Qualitative research has been described as implying a direct concern with experience as it is lived by the participants (Brown, 1996; Freebody, 2003; Sherman & Webb, 1988). The goal of a qualitative interview which is the main method I decided to use for data collection is to understand the subject's point of view and the meaning that he or she makes of his or her experiences (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1991). I used an interview format with a few prepared open-ended questions, used probes to gain more information when necessary, and followed the flow of the conversation to ask additional questions as important topics emerged (Patton, 1990; Schensuel, Schensuel, & LeCompte, 1999).

My prepared questions were: (1) Tell me about a time you learned something, whatever comes to mind spontaneously. (2) What is your definition of learning or education? (3) Tell me about your learning experiences as a child and young person. After the person answered the third question, I would ask them more questions about the traditional learning methodologies the person described in his or her answer. If they did not mention this point, I would usually ask them

to compare their experience with that of students of today.. I did not always ask the first question directly if a person spontaneously began telling me about learning experiences when we began the conversation.

My data collection for this chapter was done through interviews and e-mail correspondence. I had interviews with twelve of the fourteen people described above while I was in Bhutan. One I spoke with while he was visiting Santa Barbara and also through e-mail, and one I communicated with only through e-mails. The last two contacts included only some of my open-ended questions but were more focused on specific topics. Eight interviews were done in English while six required translation by our tour guide, hereditary Lama Ngodup Dorji, or a family member of the interviewee. In addition to the interviews, I had conversations about some aspect of education with several other people in Bhutan and will refer to those when they provide information relevant to my research..

Although I had expected to do some one-on-one interviews, all of the interviews were done in some kind of group setting. This was partly due to the fact that officially Dr. Robert Reynolds and I were considered to be a tour group and our only means of transportation and access to people was through our one tour guide who also served as translator when one was needed. In addition, several of the interviews were done in homes or monasteries where our visit was considered a kind of social occasion as well as a time to gather information. We were usually served tea and often met other family members. People seemed quite relaxed in these settings and spoke freely about their learning experiences. As I stated earlier, I asked a few open-

ended questions about their learning experiences, definition of learning and education, and the current education systems in Bhutan. I then asked follow-up questions to get further information relevant to their responses. Often a conversation developed in which all present discussed a topic related to education or the current situation in Bhutan. If time allowed, I would then go on to ask for more details about my prepared open-ended questions and ask any others that seemed relevant. These interviews ranged in length from fifteen to ninety minutes. The longer interviews usually developed into conversations among all of those present as well as the interviewee's answering specific questions.

One of my interviews was held at the work location of an interviewee with Dr. Reynolds also present. I asked similar questions but noticed the interviewee seemed tense and less free to speak about his personal experiences at first. In another interview, I spoke with a young monk who had just been made the head (Khenpo) of certain aspects of a monastery. His mentors were also present and required him to speak in English rather than have a translator. He also was somewhat tense and took some time to speak freely. However, in all cases I was able to get my prepared open-ended questions answered to some degree and to obtain other relevant information. In all but two of the interviews done in Bhutan, I recorded the entire interview. In the other two, I made some notes while we were speaking when possible and extended notes right afterwards as suggested by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995). I also have photos of most of the people I interviewed.

## Interview Participants

I will now give a short description of those I interviewed. Then I will discuss common themes across the interviews. The first group consists of people who were educated only or first through traditional or non-Western schooling methodologies, such as apprenticeship, argumentation, awareness/ perception/intuition training, focused memorization, storytelling, and spiritual transmission. Parents, spiritual leaders, private tutors, community leaders, and experienced colleagues were considered to be the “teachers” in these situations.

1. Ashi Kunzang Choden (50’s) – member of family of local royalty in central Bhutan, author of first book of Bhutanese folktales in English, former teacher, member of government committee on education
2. Teytey (71) – raised on farm, retired member of Royal Guard, father of Deputy Director of Royal Institute of Health Sciences
3. Yak herder (80’s) – retired merchant and farmer
4. Lay Nun (80’s) – wife of yak herder, retired weaver
5. Tsering (Haap) Norbu (81) – monk, former government worker
6. Dasho Shingkar Lama (86) – hereditary lama, secretary for second and third kings, artist, poet
7. Lopen (Buddhist master) Tseten (57) – head of Tamshing Monastery
8. Khenpo (30’s) – overseer of college section of Lhodra Karchu Monastery

The second group consists of people who attended Bhutan’s public schools but

also participated in some form of traditional learning such as storytelling, focused memorization, or apprenticeship in their families or communities. Although Ngodup Dorji is a hereditary lama, he did not attend monastic schools as a child but received his monastic training as an adult in India

9. Dorji Penjore (30's) – researcher at Centre for Bhutan studies with interest in and experience of traditional storytelling

10. Karma Galay (30's) – researcher at Centre for Bhutan Studies

11. Ngodup Dorji (40's) – hereditary lama, our tour guide and translator

The third group consists of people who had much of their early schooling in India but also kept a strong sense of connection to their families and Bhutanese culture. They saw similarities between the values promoted in their Catholic education and the values of Bhutanese culture.

12. Gyalthshen (Getse) Penjor (40's) – former Bhutanese representative to U.N., member of Royal Education Council

13. Ugen Choden (30's) – Bhutan Foundation staff member, daughter of Dasho Shingkar Lama

14. Tashi Wangyal (34) – former government positions in finance and foreign service, member of Royal Education Council

### **Common Themes Across Interviews**

Even those these interviewees were divided into these three groups, there are several themes that I found across the groups. Two of the themes relate to the purposes of and motivations for formal learning. The other two relate to literacy and

the types of learning methodologies which learners experienced both formally and informally. I will illustrate these themes mainly with quotes from my interview transcripts. The use of the interviewees' own voices can illustrate the similarities across groups and also possibly provide some evidence of the effects of the educational methodologies people experienced through their style of speaking, use of particular expressions, and ways of reasoning. In addition, the shifting between interviewees' stories and my analysis will provide an illustration of my experience with many of the interviewees who shifted between stories and linear explanations or descriptions.

#### (1) Formal Learning Related to Spiritual/Moral Development

One of the themes common to most of these interviews is the sense that one of the main purposes of formal education is for spiritual development or the gaining of moral values. This theme is found in interviews from all three groups related to people's own experiences and their goals for current and future education in Bhutan.

Those two interviewees who are leaders in monasteries spoke directly about education being for the purpose of spiritual development;

Lopen Tseten shared the following:

The foundation of all learning is reading and writing. Then when you grow up, you pursue different teachers for empowerment and then practice that. To understand and practice that is what knowledge is to me....So it's like reading and writing, philosophy, being able to do the grammar – all those things are part of it – what it takes to tame your mind to receive empowerment. So final touch is to have the instructions and empowerment and be able to practice within yourself, and that becomes your life.

The Khenpo gave this definition and description of the experience of learning:

You hear teaching. It is important – helps our mind to focus. We study Buddhist texts, just read them and meditate. We use it to calm the mind .... Thinking about a particular guru can help our affections to clear.

Those interviewees who had previous secular work but now have a spiritual vocation also spoke about the spiritual motivation or purpose for learning:

The Lay Nun spoke this way about the purpose for learning:

I don't know much, but I can read and write and know all the prayers to do in my life... (Speaking about when she was a yak herder's wife and weaver ) I taught basic reading and writing to all my eight children so they all know how to do the prayers.

Tsering Norbu who had government experience and now is a monk stated this:

The most important purpose of learning is to be true to yourself, to follow and be who you are. (When asked how do you learn this) I was with many high lamas and got transmissions and have recited mantras thousands of times.

Dasho Shingkar Lama explained that in addition to gaining literacy to fulfill family service to the government, learning was seen as the spiritual preparation for his work as the reincarnation of a famous lama:

My father was teaching me recognize the letters, and when I could read, I said many times the Seven-Fold prayers.

The two traditionally educated interviewees who did not have a spiritual vocation also spoke about an important purpose of learning being moral or spiritual development.

Teytey described his learning after finding a lay monk to teach him to read at age fifteen:

I read different kinds of prayers. Some were ten pages. I memorized all that... When I was twenty years old, I went to Tibet and received some teachings.

Ashi Choden discussed her learning as a child and her definition of education:

As a child my father was privileged enough to hire a tutor so we had a little home school. But then we were learning the alphabet and immediately learning the text by heart. Religion and education were seen as synonymous.....And because we did a lot of listening – the ethics and morals of our culture are in the stories. I think for me education – is very hard to define education. Do you want a practical definition? Do you want education that makes you a better person? Or in the Bhutanese Buddhist context, education does give you a better rebirth, next life. – or how do you say – you are in the service of sentient beings.

The three interviewees who had little or no secular Bhutanese education but were sent to Catholic schools in India also spoke of the importance of values and moral development as a purpose of education.

Ugen Choden spoke about moral values in education this way:

I participated in chapel, choir and all the other activities of Catholic school....We received a moral education....I have sent my son to a school in Sikkim where he will be taught Buddhist values because I was not satisfied with public schools in Bhutan.

Getse Penjor described his education experience this way:

I went away to India to Jesuit School at five and later to other countries but didn't lose my Bhutanese identity. I think the Jesuits did a good job. There was meditation and an atmosphere of learning.

Tashi Wangyal spoke of his education having an emphasis on values:

I always received good advice from my family – that to – in order to live happily and peacefully you have to have such core values....And then the Catholic school I went to in India – they placed a lot of emphasis on values.

The three interviewees currently working on school reform and research on GNH also referred in that context to the importance of spiritual and moral values in education. Ashi comes from the traditionally educated group, Karma from the group educated in Bhutanese schools, and Tashii from the group educated in Catholic

schools in India:

Ashi Choden discussed the loss of values in education currently:

Now after about fifty years of education, Bhutanese educators feel like we have missed out on values education. So a few years ago – said we're missing something in our education. We're not making good citizens. Now they are thinking of putting in some stories.

Karma Galay spoke of one of the goals of education:

One purpose of education is to enlighten society.

Tashi Wangyal emphasized the importance of values education:

The need for values education still stands – even more so now that society is evolving – evolving fast... Most of the values – say Buddhist values – are universal values – compassion, kindness – and you know of love and care toward each other – taking care of the environment – these are universal values.... In education whatever standards may be, without adequate values – education is going to be – you will have like a soulless thing and deprive young people of the essential elements of being Bhutanese.

## (2) Strong Sense of Meaning and Personal/Internal Motivation in Learning

The second theme relates to meaning and motivation in learning. Many of the interviewees from all three groups spoke directly about their sense of how meaningful or important learning was to them, and others implied that importance by describing how hard they worked to gain that learning. Not everyone had the opportunity for formal learning in the past, and it was considered a valuable privilege worth pursuing by those I interviewed who were educated before public schooling became common. Formal learning was also considered to be meaningful and not just a requirement to those who were educated in Catholic schools or by a combination of secular Bhutanese schools and traditional learning methodologies.

Along with its limited availability, the already discussed point that formal learning has been associated with spiritual and moral development which is highly valued in Bhutanese culture could be one of the reasons for that sense of internal motivation across groups. For some, it was also considered to be a willingly accepted duty related to their family's position in society. Some contrasted their experiences with those of Bhutanese children today who are all expected to go to school, which now has a strong association with obtaining a good job in the future, but seem to have less internal motivation to learn.

Some interviewees from the first group who were traditionally educated told stories about having to find their own teachers, create their own writing materials, find time to learn to read and write or teach those skills to their children during very busy and difficult lives, and fulfill their family's duty to serve the government. In addition to the examples from these interviewees, in the next chapter I will discuss the case of the first monastic school for lay people opened in 1961. At that time, people moved to the school from all over the country to study and were described as having very strong internal motivation.

Teytey described his persistence in learning without Western schooling:

Up to fifteen years I was in the village....looking after the cows. ...I had the urge to learn something but never had the opportunity to go to any type of school ....In my village – neighborhood – there was one man ... a lay monk . He was teaching the alphabet....I had the script and then copied the alphabet...the script I learned in about three days...When I was twenty-four, I had to join the army... I found some pieces of script to read....I found some words that were difficult, and I could not understand. There were other people in the army who could read and write. I asked those people...In the royal body guard I had a friend ...I could learn from him how to write....I read a little more difficult stories and a

little bit into the literature, and whenever I found it difficult to understand something, I went and asked my friend....If I'd given up earlier, I would never have learned.

Yak Herder explained the work involved in preparing writing materials:

I was taught by my father to read and write....We made ink from plants. We had to add bear's bile so wasn't ruined by heat in summer and a little musk so didn't freeze in winter and to have it flow. Our paper was handmade.

The Lay Nun described how she pursued learning for herself and her children despite her busy and difficult life as a yak herder's wife and weaver:

I learned to read and write from my mother. I myself taught basic reading and writing to all my eight children.... I studied with my children a little bit in morning, then some while weaving, and then after day's work whatever had been studied was gone over. I had to clothe my children, my parents, and grandparents. I had to sell my weaving to get food. We suffered a lot.

Dasho Shingkar Lama expressed the sense of purpose in his learning from his father and then his fellow workers at the court to fulfill his family's duty to the government:

Very few people in those days could read and write. I had to substitute for my uncle who ran away to India. It was a tax in some form for our family. We have been required to give service in court for last fifteen generations, since the 1300's. (Then he laughed and spoke to our guide, his younger half brother, who is also a hereditary lama) Now you are our family's tax.

Others from each group spoke of their excitement and sense of meaning in learning, their appreciation for a kind of learning that strengthened their values and related to their lives, or a combination of personal, practical, and spiritual motives for learning. Two members of the first group of traditionally educated learners made these comments about meaning and motivation.

Ashi Choden spoke about the relevance of education in her childhood:

This education was just part of our growing up...Thinking back it becomes much more valuable than when we were living it...growing up in the village you were much more aware that the education that we had – as a small child – education was relevant to our lives.

Teytey gave this answer to questions about whether his experience of finding his own texts, teachers, etc. was common for people his age and what motivated him:

There were quite a few people who were interested to learn to read and write. We were motivated by our officers and even the school students. Since we didn't have the opportunity to study when we were younger, we wanted to prove that adults too can learn – it is never too late to learn – and there was no need to depend on others for things like reading and writing letters, maintaining basic records, reciting prayers and reading Buddhist stories.

Two members of the second group who had a combination of Western style education in Bhutanese schools and traditional education also shared about their excitement related to learning and the interconnectedness of their learning with life.

Karma Galay spoke about his happiness to learn:

Learning something new is always exciting...I mean I was so happy when I could write the (English) alphabet – learned in school first....Yes, yes. It was an exciting experience!

Dorji Penjore described the nature of traditional learning:

Buddhist or traditional learning system is holistic (interdependence).

A member of the third group who attended Catholic schools in India but also stayed connected to their Bhutanese heritage, Tashi Wangyal, discussed the value of the moral teaching he received:

We always had moral teaching whatever we did. In fact, something that a lot of parents who went to school at that time cherish now is that they had that kind of opportunity. Yeah, then you grow up and you don't need anyone to tell you.

You figure out and appreciate it. And more so when I started to study and live in Canada. I figured out what we had at home was something beautiful – something that you know was lost in other parts of the world.

Two of those I interviewed who were traditionally educated contrasted their own experiences with those of students now, mainly from a perspective of loss of personal motivation or meaningful education today. More discussion of this loss and school reform efforts intended to address this issue will be included in the next chapter.

Teytey made this contrast between his experience and that of current students:

There are a lot of differences in how we learned when I was younger - because now the children – if they actually are interested – they have a lot of opportunities to learn....but I find that nowadays children do not have that much interest like I used to have because we didn't have the opportunity if we had the interest or yearnings for learning more. Now – maybe children now are really – even though they do many things – they don't want to learn even though they have the opportunity....In those days we could not....the schools were not there....and we had to worry more about our daily bread, what we will eat tomorrow and all those things .And. we did not have much time to think about education.

Ashi Choden also discussed the differences in education during her childhood and that of today:

Today's education – biggest concern is that the things children are learning in school is just theory and they are not able to do it. But I think the village education was much more down to earth....and so looking back to how we started – the kind of education we had without schools but in the homes was much more holistic because there wasn't a mother who would teach you food science and a father who would teach you religion. Everything was interconnected so you were – from what I understand you were having much more integrated, holistic education. We're advised to define disciplines and now that we are going to be specializing in physics or sociology or everything else you know. So maybe we should go back to what we had originally – for the holistic that we had.

In contrast to these concerns about children's learning in schools, Tashi Wangyl, who was educated in a Catholic school in India but stayed very connected to his Bhutanese values, shared a positive experience about his six-year old daughter's internal motivation to learn when she was provided with freedom to follow her curiosity and had adult support and access to information while he schooled her at home for a time:

From the indigenous hospital we walked straight up to the top of the hill. That way I am able to boost her physical resiliency....and we took a small picnic. And then she asked me – it was very natural – ‘ Why is the grasshopper colored like the grass?’ I said that it's to hide. Now she doesn't have to learn that in grade seven. Just last week we were walking up hill and there was a small patch where there was a forest fire and she commented ‘ Isn't it sad the forest fire killed all the trees?’ And we walked and she saw the grass sprouting. And she said ‘ Oh, it's bad for the trees but it's actually good for the grass.’ So these are the conclusions she draws. That's learning naturally.

### (3) Alphabetic Literacy Strongly Related to Formal Learning

The third theme is related to the connection of alphabetic literacy to formal learning. The conception of reading and writing as the foundation of monastic learning and personal spiritual development which has been described in earlier quotes illustrates the strong connection between alphabetic literacy and learning in Bhutan. My interviews seem to indicate that in Bhutan alphabetic literacy was traditionally used in ways that fit the culture and personal desires of those using it rather than in the ways that are promoted by modern Western schooling as discussed by Scribner & Cole (1981) and Street (1993). Currently in Bhutan both perspectives on literacy exist with potential conflict between them arising.

The great respect for literacy, and possibly its rarity when the interviewees

were growing up, is demonstrated in my interviews by the many descriptions of learning the alphabet given when I asked people to describe some learning experience they had had. I have already quoted such descriptions by Teytey, Ashi Choden, and Dasho Shinkhar Lama from the traditionally educated group and Karma Galay from the group who attended public schools while also participating in some traditional learning. I will now provide further quotes from these and other interviewees illustrating their memories related to learning the alphabet. I will also present some folk traditions about the alphabet which were mentioned. This focus on learning the alphabet when asked to describe whatever spontaneously came to mind when they thought of a time they had learned something or in discussing what learning consists of was in contrast to my interviews with people in the U.S. While interviewing eight people in the U.S. for another project, I asked similar questions about their learning experiences and definitions of learning. Not one of them mentioned anything about learning the alphabet.

Two of the traditionally educated interviewees made these comments.

Ashi Choden spoke of the first Western style school she attended in Bhutan after being educated at home and through village storytelling:

Students from all over the country were collected whoever wanted to go, whoever dared to go...When my father and mother decided that we would go – the only Western education we had in that school was that someone knew the alphabet and he was hired to teach us ABC. And we were very fast at learning things by heart so he had nothing else to teach. So my father said ‘Teach them backwards.’ So we had to say it by heart – don’t think I can do it now.

The Yak Herder spontaneously mentioned this story while discussing his early

learning experiences

There is a local story about how the letters of the alphabet came to be. The cat's ear has a double layer. The cat hid the letter there from the pigeon who was trying to take it. This is similar to another alphabet story. At dawn when the rooster – cock – crows, the crow hears it and repeats it.

A member of the second group, Ngodup Dorji, shared this about his experience in a Bhutanese public school:

We had to write all the alphabet. If we didn't, the teacher had a big stick and would poke us.

Lopen Tseten told about an interesting experience at his monastery related to learning the alphabet by children. The public schools in Bhutan have a winter break for one and a half months. During that time the neighboring villagers bring their children to the Tamshing Monastery to learn. Lopen Tseten described the experience this way:

I said to the parents that this is only for one and a half months so it must be hard for the kids to know what's going on. But the parents said that their children do much better in school after coming here. (After I asked him how) It is not by helping them to understand the meaning but by reading – focusing on pronunciation, oral reading, and spelling. In school they know it but couldn't write it...Here they say letters out loud while writing them.

Our guide Lama Ngodup Dorji explained that the alphabet in the Chokey language which is used at the monastery is very similar to the alphabet in the national language of Dzongkha in school. In school children may know how to speak the language but cannot write it well. They do not know the letters well enough to read them from script but can only identify them through pictures of objects beginning with that letter similar to our use of A for apple, etc. At the

monastery they learn to write the letters while saying them out loud which has improved their school work in Dzongkha. This example is consistent with the success of using similar methods in teaching reading in Eritrea cited in the literature chapter (Wright, 2001) and with Luria's (1966) work on teaching spelling in Russian. I will discuss this example more later when I address possible ways of combining elements of modern and traditional learning in Bhutan.

#### (4) Experience of Non-Western Learning Methodologies

Many of my interviewees had experiences with what I referred to as non-Western learning methodologies in the background literature section. These consist of methodologies not commonly used in current Western schooling systems. Of course, those in the traditionally educated group were trained through these methodologies, but members of all groups had experiences with memorization and storytelling. I will describe some of the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees about the value of these methodologies and look at these in light of the literature.

##### (a) Apprenticeship/Mentorship

Several of the interviewees mentioned the gaining of practical skills through being with, watching, and asking questions of people with those skills. Not all the interviewees mentioned this type of experience. One mentioned it on her own. I did not ask people about this unless they spoke about having a vocation that involved these types of skills, so others may also have experienced this methodology but did not discuss it. I had a general interview question asking people to describe some

learning experiences they had had and to define or tell me the meaning of the word “learning” or “education.” As my previous quotes and discussion indicate, learning is generally associated with spiritual and moral development and alphabetic literacy so people did not seem that likely to mention practical skills when asked about learning. When I asked the four people from the traditionally educated group who mentioned doing work involving practical skills about how they learned those, two first said they did not learn them but just somehow got them by watching people, etc. although one changed that view later in the interview.

The Lay Nun gave this response when asked about how she learned to weave:

My mother knew how to weave. Everyone in the village was doing it. It didn't feel like you were learning. It was more of a social move.

Teytey provided this answer when asked how he learned to farm and take care of animals:

Farming and use of the axe – that you actually don't have to learn because you see that when you are looking....When I was working in the field, I also learned how to weave the bamboo baskets.

He eventually acknowledged that gaining practical skills was also learning when asked what learning or education was to him:

Education to me does not mean only going to school and learning all the academic things but taking your common events and going out onto the farm and learning how to do things – that is also an education. It doesn't include only going to school or the office, but you also learn certain things – certain trades – and – go to office. But there are certain people who work in the field, and learning how to grow things on the field is also education.

Ashi Choden described practical learning through a kind of mentorship:

But I think the village education was much more down to earth. For

instance around the hearth, we never had lessons how to cook. We learned by watching and doing. We didn't have – we had land documents but couldn't read so children went to the parents and figured out where are the boundaries. By living their lives they had an education – and a very useful kind of education – down to earth. And you are very practical with your hands and you knew your – you learned your genealogy by listening to people talk – and who was related to who – and you came from the roots and you could trace back over the generations. Now people in Thimphu say 'I don't know where I came from. My mother is from somewhere in the East.

Dasho Shinkhar Lama described his learning when he went to serve at the second king's court at seventeen:

My education, learning by a teacher, stopped, and I was learning and working. The advantage was that the senior secretaries would have knowledge and experience and just instruct me what to do. And that's how I was learning.....His senior secretary ...was the one who trained me – and that really helped me a lot – even to learn the way to communicate with other people and how to draft – write letters. I got lot of knowledge and learning from him.

#### (b) Focused Memorization

Many of the interviewees mentioned learning through memorization, often speaking of it positively in relation to learning the alphabet or prayers and spiritual texts as already mentioned in quotes by Teytey, Ashi Choden, Dasho Shinkhar Lama, and Lopen Tseten.. Some also spoke of it negatively as rote learning without any understanding of meaning in the way it was used in the past form of traditional learning and in the Western model of schools brought from India although most of the criticism was directed at their experiences with Indian style Western schooling. This latter point will be addressed further in the next chapter related to school reform. I will now give some further quotes related to memorization. The first three relate to monastic learning.

Lama Ngodup Dorji explained the common situation in monastic learning in his commentary as a translator during an interview of Dasho Shinkhar Lama:

It's that same process of learning by heart... My commentary is this – that normally when you memorize something it doesn't mean you know the meaning of the word – just memorize and then you find out or get instructed.

Dasho Shinkhar Lama gave this answer to the question of how he remembered what he was required to memorize:

Repetition of the text and the word....It was very helpful if you understood a little bit of what you were reading and writing.

In answer to whether he was in a certain physical state when he was doing memorizing, he stated:

Of course, you paid more attention – and rhythm of the text. If you knew the meaning somewhat, it helped you – made the flow easy – what comes after what... We had to make up something sort of like internal reading. It's more like when you read it aloud. It becomes more clear to you in your mind.

Lopen Tseten spoke of the monks studying at the monastery:

They wake up early in morning – do about an hour of recitation and memorization.

Both negative and positive effects are described by a traditionally trained learner while a public school learner focused mainly on the negative effects:

Ashi Choden mentioned the possible negatives when using traditional forms like memorization but also referred to a positive aspect:

Where you accept everything – you don't – no doubt – no hesitation. (After a discussion about the need for a teacher to help student go on to do something with what has been memorized) But then what interests me with the teachers – monks and even teachers...even though they had memorized a lot – I'm always impressed when in conversation or when they are trying to make a point – how they could pull a story out of thin air.

Karma Galay spoke of his experience with memorization in Bhutanese public schools:

We were asked to memorize. Rote memorization was really popular those days. We were taught by written – everything was written for us – and we were like copying and when was time for examinations it was kind of like just what the teacher had written for us – just reproduce But now I hear it is changing in schools – like this – some kind of interaction.

### (c) Storytelling

Several of my interviewees talked about their experiences with oral storytelling as children in their families and communities. As mentioned in the literature, most of the Bhutanese experienced listening to storytelling until very recently. Storytelling is seen as having accomplished many functions in the past. Two traditionally trained interviewees spoke about storytelling in detail:

Teytey who grew up on a farm and experienced only traditional learning methodologies responded as follows after he was asked if he grew up with storytelling and his adult daughter said that he did because she had heard many stories from him:

In those days we really loved listening to stories because we didn't have many storybooks and all those things and because older people – granddads – they told the stories.

Ashi Choden who grew up listening to stories with the village children spoke of the functions storytelling served:

So I think folktales served a lot of different purposes. It was because we had little entertainment. I think it was the bonding of the families and the communities that work through storytelling. Everybody told stories and although there would be some who were better than others ...in our village there were two or three people – they weren't storytellers in that they were professional

storytellers but they were good storytellers. Everybody used to just flock around them and catch them. People would invite them to come and share the fire, and then everyone would just gather very spontaneously. It used to happen and what was interesting was that nobody questioned the accuracy of a story as such... Everyone's story – the way it was told – was accepted. According to grandmother so-and-so and grandfather so-and so, it was.

One of the monastic educators described the use of stories at the monastery, and one of the public school educated interviewees spoke of his personal experience with storytelling:

Lopen Tseten spoke of monastic learning when he was young:

Monks (young) are just learning to read and write, but when you grow up, that's when you start stories.

Dorji Penjore gave this picture of storytelling in his childhood:

When I was a child, I always used to go to sleep listening to elders' folktales, or in many cases we children took turns to tell stories.

Many people not only talked about storytelling but also answered my questions by telling stories about their lives and folk stories, such as the alphabet story by the yak herder already discussed. Our guide Lama Ngodup Dorji referred to and told us many stories as we traveled through Bhutan, including pointing out a traditional Buddhist story in a bookstore which he had learned as a child and was now being studied by his son in school. Some interviewees also shared about this tradition being lost for many children today although there are some attempts to revive the tradition through using the stories in written form or in the media. An interesting point related to this is that oral storytelling had an interactive feature which may not be duplicated in written forms of the stories. Ashi Choden who grew up listening to

stories and has published several books of traditional stories described that feature:

It wasn't rigid; it was very interactive – we responded (She said a word in her language.) – it literally means 'and then?'. Because it was an oral tradition and not written down, I think it was a way of assuring that people were listening – but the belief was that if you didn't respond, the stories would be stolen. The stories were so attractive, that it would be stolen by the spirits, who also listened to the stories.

Dorji Penjore told a story as part of an e-mail discussion about the differences found in Western and traditional learning systems. He experienced Bhutanese public schools as well as traditional learning at home and in his village and now has a graduate degree in anthropology:

I often compare compartmentalized Western knowledge and the old knowledge to a famous story about a pond frog and an ocean frog (you know the story). Buddhist or traditional learning system is holistic (interdependence) like the ocean frog knowing a bit and pieces about many things while Western learning system like the pond frog knows about one thing in depth – that divides into many smaller systems in the name of specialization and division of labor – is quite narrow.

Many of my interviews, especially those with older people, involved the detailed telling of stories about past experiences not just short answers to my questions. Some like Tsering Norbu who experienced only traditional learning methodologies rarely gave me a linear answer to a question. I interviewed him outside at a traditional festival so was not able to record everything he said, but he told many stories about his life such as one about how he had intended to go away to visit America in his youth and study English and mechanical engineering but was not allowed to go because the government required his services. He then went on tell more stories about being with high lamas and getting transmissions. When I asked

him if children can do this today and how people can gain similar values to his, he did not give a linear answer but told another long story about how he went somewhere and met some lama from whom he got a transmission. He demonstrated the answers to my questions through his stories and gestures. He had very focused energy and a strong presence. He told another story of again not being allowed to leave the country when he wanted to travel to Australia because he was needed in Bhutan. His stories and way of being illustrated his one direct answer about how to live and learn no matter what your circumstances: “The most important thing is to be true to yourself.”

When Ashi Choden who grew up listening to stories and has compiled the first book of Bhutanese traditional stories in English was asked about whether those who were trained traditionally thought and spoke differently, she answered as follows:

I think that is quite – you can see the difference quite well – some – person is talking – for instance, a person who has been educated in Dzongkha. Here they are much more direct and much to the point. In the Dzongkha articulation it is very – substance may not be that much – but way you say it. And they use much more cases of examples and stories, similes, metaphors than English. And I have a – problem with that – I repeat a lot and I give a lot of examples and he (her Swiss husband) says you should be direct and not beat around the bush....I think I don't know – how the new national assembly members will be, but in the old – previous – national assembly the members were stressing the eloquence and practicing their beautiful speech and telling stories rather than getting to the point. I think now it will be different, and in a way it's sad because we will lose that.

This concern about the loss of the storytelling tradition was discussed in the chapter on Bhutanese literature and reiterated by some of the interviewees. It was commonly related to the introduction of radio and television to Bhutan although a

positive example of storytelling being revived through the radio was also given.

Dorji Penjore spoke about the changes:

Today, our way of life, even in remote villages, is changing fast. Radio has replaced folktales as one form of entertainment. TV is fast catching up.

Ashi Choden shared a similar description:

This doesn't happen anymore [the storytelling]. In many places it is very rare. Most of the urban areas where television is, the students watch it like God, and now with the radio – before the shortwave radio which the government – now with the FM radio reaching everywhere, I think people don't listen to stories anymore. (After being asked about stories in the media) I think it hasn't seriously been worked ...there are people recognizing it and making a conscious and subconscious effort, but talk is one thing. (Later giving a positive example of revival of stories in Dzongkha on FM radio) They have come up with a very powerful thing called Kuzu – radio thing – they've started Kuzu Family. We had people from all over joining in. And they had names. They are not the names they are registered in public but giving them folk names ...going back to our roots ...is still there – and rather than be taught in histories – you must – as soon as this has taken off...I think Bhutanese people haven't gone over the hill. We could be lost, but we haven't yet.

As already mentioned in the chapter on Bhutanese history and literature, some of the traditional stories have been incorporated into values education in the public school curriculum. A need to do this with an updated form of the stories that people now can better relate to is proposed by an interviewee who is involved in school reform as a member of the Royal Education Council, Tashi Wangyal:

(Speaking of materials for values education, including traditional stories) Some of these texts in Dzongkha – I think they do exist in one form or the other but it's just a matter of having people – getting the best of both worlds...engaging them in a manner that is engaging and has some relevance to the modern day context – again going back to 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> century it's very difficult to – you have to adjust to each developmental stage of their minds – that's what we have to do....we feel we are in the process.

#### (d) Argumentation

As discussed in the background literature chapter, the learning methodology of argumentation in the form of debate is very prominent in Tibetan Buddhism and widely practiced in some of the Tibetan Buddhist schools in India. The debate tradition is not as strong in Bhutan but is now being incorporated more into some monasteries where the leaders were trained in India (Phuntsho, personal conversation January 2009). The young Khenpo at Lhodrakarchu Monastery was the only interviewee who mentioned experience with debate:

(After giving the daily schedule for the monastery students which begins at 4:15 a.m. and ends at 10:00 p.m. and includes an hour and a half of debate in the afternoon) Debate clears doubt. When you get doubt – has to get discussed to clear....Only institute (college level) students debate. You ask question. People answer in attempt to resolve doubt. If someone says wrong answer, then someone tries to clear it. Both sides have to use text. They go back and forth until resolved. Most done in Chokey although study English in monastery level....Other people come to watch (debate). Some people came from Tawain.

The public schools in Bhutan have no debate instruction. In fact, the type of “chalk and talk” schooling brought from India did not usually include even informal discussion. Some attempts are now being made to change this, and they will be examined further in the next chapter.

Karma Galay who attended public schools in Bhutan contrasted that experience with his studies in the U.S.:

I found a big difference when I first went to school in the U.S. That was a big change for me. I mean the students are debating the teachers and you know like there was a lot of discussion in the class. That never happened when we went to school here, for instance. We were asked to memorize....But now I hear it is changing in schools – like this – some kind of interaction.

Tashi Wangyal who attended Catholic school in India and is now a member of the REC described the common situation in Bhutanese public schools:

A lot of teachers have basically chalk and talk. The teacher comes and turns his back to the kid – who looks at everybody else’s back – no interaction. So instead of enjoying, everybody is there to just listen to the sermon of the day....teachers look to see how much time is on the clock – so we would like to change some of these aspects.

(e) Awareness/Perception/Intuition Training

The training of awareness is an important aspect of the Buddhist tradition and is practiced in Bhutan by spiritual masters and monastic students as well as by lay people pursuing spiritual development. However, it is not part of the public education system. Awareness/perception/intuition training is often associated with meditation which trains and focuses the mind. Meditation and other types of awareness training were only mentioned by those with some type of monastic training in Bhutan and one interviewee who studied in Jesuit schools in India. Several statements related to this type of practice have already been presented in the section about formal learning being associated with spiritual/moral development by Lopen Tseten (tame mind to receive empowerment), Khenpo (meditate – we use it to calm the mind), Tsering Norbu (getting transmissions from high lamas and reciting mantras thousands of time), and Getse Penjor (there was meditation there – referring to Jesuit School he attended).

Four more statements relating to the training of the mind were made by interviewees with monastic training. This awareness training was related to the development of spiritual capacities and the ability to provide spiritual help to others.

Other than an artistic ability passed down through reincarnation, no mention was made of this mental training developing intuitive abilities related to practical skills or wisdom in decision making although it is said to clear the mind. This type of development may sometimes be included in the purposes for the training of the mind as mentioned in some of the literature, but I found no mention of it in my interviews.

Ngodup Dorji, our guide and a hereditary lama who attended Bhutanese public schools as a child answered a question about whether movement is part of the practice of realization:

Dance in some other forms is part of the practice of yoga. We want free flow. Dance helps with that.

The Khenpo responded this way after being asked if dancing helps to clear the mind:

We have to think about something we want to discover – a particular guru. We have to think that while we do it (dance). ...It can help our affections to clear.

Tsering Norbu, former government official and now a monk, gave this answer to a question asking him to explain the meaning of getting transmissions from high lamas:

It is from hearing. You are like this empty vessel, and then you are filled with it and then can transmit it to others. Many people come to me and have me pray for them – for children who are sick and other things.

Dasho Shingkar Lama stated this after a discussion of artistic ability coming naturally to him because he is the reincarnation of high lama who was an artist and being asked if he remembered his past life:

Not now but when I was a little boy I remembered and meditated about my past

life. One story is that I found some gold hidden in one of the shrines by that lama. I told people I had gold hidden and found it.

This apparent separation of awareness training through meditation and movement from practical education was confirmed by the absence of such practices in public schools in Bhutan. Although there is the desire to incorporate Buddhist values such as compassion and respect for the environment into the school curriculum through the use of traditional stories and other methods, this does not seem to include the incorporation of spiritual practices such as meditation into the school day. There are several factors that may be contributing to this: the British Indian school models adopted by Bhutan did not include such practices, awareness practices are considered to be a kind of expertise of spiritual masters, and there is little awareness of the research in the West about the value of these practices. An e-mail conversation with Royal Education Council member and teacher educator, Sangay Jamtsho, whom I met when he visited Santa Barbara, addressed some of these issues. After sharing with him some of the research on the success of such practices in the West, I asked him if meditation practices were used in Bhutanese public schools and whether there would be any objections to using such practices when research shows their value. He responded as follows:

I'm not aware of any meditation practices being taught in our schools. It will indeed be very good and perhaps even welcome if indeed they are found to be beneficial. In Bhutan meditation still tends to be seen as the realm of religious masters or practitioners – I myself have very little knowledge of it.

### **Individual Learning Experiences and Education Aligned with GNH**

Those working in Bhutan to create an education system aligned with GNH can

gain insight into their work through considering the experiences of interviewees who received their education only or partially through traditional methodologies. This topic will be considered more in the next chapter.

Since GNH is said to be based upon the values of Bhutan's traditional Buddhist culture, it is important to study how those values were incorporated into traditional education experiences and which aspects of those experiences are crucial for maintaining those values. Studying the experiences of these interviewees can help those creating a reformed school system to gain clarity about what the essential elements of education based upon traditional Bhutanese culture are and to ensure that essence is included in the new system they are creating. Much can be learned about this from statements of the interviewees about the positives of their own education and about what they feel is lacking in today's system .

The finding that nearly all of these interviewees saw spiritual/moral development as a main purpose of formal education is consistent with an education system aligned with GNH and with the direction the REC is moving in their efforts to incorporate values education into all sections of the curriculum. The importance of internal motivation and meaningful learning to these interviewees also fits well with an education system aligned with GNH as well as with Western research on the importance of internal motivation and its loss with the introduction of a Western school system based on external motivation. The holistic type of education in which learning was connected to all aspects of life experienced by many of the interviewees also seems compatible with GNH including care for the environment in a way that

Western education which cuts knowledge into many disconnected pieces and emphasizes competition is not

The introduction of a Western schooling model and the many other changes in Bhutanese society make it less possible today for students to use individual initiative and persistence to obtain an education that is both personally meaningful and vocationally useful. A sense of meaning and interest in learning have to now be created to some degree by those creating the structure and methodologies of the school system in coordination with other parts of the government to be sure the education system is synchronized with the future options actually available to students and encourages their natural curiosity and personal interests and talents. The student-centered models the REC has chosen for primary education do provide opportunities for internal motivation to direct student learning. Looking at the secondary schools in the U.S. which incorporate both personalized learning and standards could provide models for the REC at this level of schooling.

I will discuss more about how this issue of internal motivation and meaning is being addressed by the REC and the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Bhutan in the next chapter. Those in these institutions who are carrying out this work can be informed by looking at the underlying dynamics of internal motivation found in these interviewees. Understanding the essence of their experiences can be helpful in creating education environments which support the development of internal motivation in today's very different external circumstances.

### **Insights from the Interviews Related to Learning Methodologies**

These interviews demonstrate that many people in Bhutan have experience with and even expertise in traditional learning methodologies. The experiences of the interviewees support the view that a number of these methodologies have effects that could be beneficial if the methodologies were adapted for use in the Bhutanese public school system. Bhutan has the opportunity to reincorporate some of these methodologies which are part of its heritage and still extant in Bhutan into an education system that is aligned with GNH and includes the best of non-Western and Western education methodologies.

I noticed some trends related to the effects of particular non-Western learning methodologies in my interviews. I observed that interviewees whose learning involved a great deal of meditation and awareness training were very focused and had a strong presence while we were communicating. I did not see these interviewees in a variety of settings so do not know how well they moved between settings or were able to use their capacity for focus in different contexts or had gained a capacity for flexibility through this methodology as was discussed in the literature. I did see Lopen Tseten sitting near his computer, and he mentioned doing two very different kinds of work: teaching and giving spiritual transmissions to monks and his administrative work including fundraising.

Nearly all of the interviewees did a lot of memorization as part of their education experience, and several were still able to quote stories, poems, and prayers for me. Many of them remembered in great detail their memorizing of the

alphabet and certain prayers and stories. Two of them also presented their negative evaluation of some of the rote memorization they did in the public schools as children. One told a story about being able to learn the English alphabet very quickly because she and her friends were so used to memorizing. I would need to spend more time with the interviewees to see more of the effects of the memorization they did. I did notice that those who had done memorization of traditional materials like spiritual texts, poems, prayers, and folk tales seemed to still find those texts meaningful and sometimes had a kind of rhythm in their speaking.

There are other aspects of the interviews related to memorization which deserve further investigation. The kind of “internal reading” ability practiced as a part of memorization which was mentioned by Dasho Shingkar Lama and Ngodup Dorji seems to be a benefit of focused memorization that should be studied further. Also the case of the children who go to Tamshing Monastery to learn the alphabet through traditional memorization methodology and then do better in Dzongkha in the public schools is a good example of the benefits of focused memorization and could prove beneficial in Dzongkha education if it were practiced at more monasteries or adopted as part of the public school system. I shared this example in an e-mail to Karma Phuntsho (Personal conversation, January, 2009), who is a Bhutanese monastic scholar and researcher in social anthropology at Cambridge. He wrote that he knew of no other cases like the village children studying at Tamshing Monastery and thought this was a “very good initiative.”

Listening to oral storytelling was also an experience of many of the

interviewees. Most consider this an important method of transmitting values and are concerned about its becoming less common. Some of them used traditional stories as illustrations when they were speaking, and nearly all of them seemed very comfortable telling detailed stories about their lives. I would need to spend more time with the interviewees to determine with more certainty whether all of those who had experiences with storytelling had the effects described in the literature, such as a more activated right brain, awareness of complexity, and flexible thinking.

I did observe these characteristics in Tsering Norbu who had a great deal of experience with storytelling, memorization, and awareness training. His answers to my questions were almost always stories that seemed to come from a right brain awareness and exemplified flexible thinking rather than black and white linear answers. Ashi Choden who is the author of books of folktales and experienced her early learning through storytelling and memorization also exhibited an understanding of complexity and flexible thinking, being able to switch back and forth from linear answers to metaphors and stories in her answers to questions and seeing things from many perspectives. Teytey who grew up on a farm and had no Western education also seemed to be able to switch back and forth easily from linear answers to metaphors and stories. Dorji Penjore who grew up with storytelling and now has a graduate degree also used a story to illustrate an intellectual point about the difference between traditional and Western education.

Traditional stories are being included in the values education curriculum of the public schools. Tashi's suggestion of updating the stories to communicate better

with the youth seems relevant for those reforming schools. However, that updating needs to be done carefully so the structure of the stories which is described in the literature as being responsible for their cognitive benefits is not lost. The Sufi stories have been updated by changing a camel to an airplane, but the basic structure of the stories has been maintained in order for the effects on thinking to be retained. Another point which seems important for them to consider is Ashi Choden's description of oral storytelling as interactive. This aspect of storytelling may be important to consider when incorporating stories within the school curriculum in order for storytelling to have the same effects related to the internalizing of the values within the stories and the becoming part of a community which the interviewees experienced.

Many of the interviewees experienced apprenticeship for learning practical skills. Their positive experience with this methodology is consistent with the literature. As was mentioned in the chapter on the history of education in Bhutan, more vocational institutes for training students in traditional arts and crafts are being created to increase the number of vocations available to students upon school completion and to maintain Bhutanese culture. The traditional method of training by apprenticeship can keep that traditional methodology alive in these institutes and train students well in the skills needed for those activities. As some interviewees stated apprenticeship also works well for gaining skills needed in agriculture. Since agriculture is still such an important aspect of life in Bhutan and young people are not gaining the skills needed for this, particularly skill in reading of the "traditional

texts” of nature, these interviews indicate that it might be beneficial to make some type of apprenticeship training in these skills a part of the curriculum for all young students in Bhutan. Making it part of the regular school curriculum could also increase its status for students.

The use of the argumentation methodology through debate was not common in the learning experiences of the interviewees although its use in the monasteries is increasing and more student discussion is being included in the public schools. Since debate is a part of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and there is evidence of its value in developing research and leadership skills and flexible thinking in Western research, it could be an important addition to a school curriculum which incorporates both traditional and Western elements. Its use could also help students who study abroad have success in Western higher education in a way that also keeps them connected to their traditions. I did a phone interview in May of 2008 with Dr. Thupten J. Langri (also called Jinpa), who is one of the Dalai Lama’s main translators. Although he is not Bhutanese, he comes from a similar cultural tradition. He received rigorous training in Tibetan Buddhist style debate in a monastery in India which he said helped him a great deal in his advanced studies at Oxford.

The experiences of these interviewees show the connectedness of these non-Western learning methodologies to Bhutanese culture, the benefits that can be gained from their use separately and in conjunction with Western methodologies, and their compatibility with GNH. The use of a combination of the traditional methodologies also seems to be related to the ability to navigate between contexts and see things

from several perspectives which is important in creating a new way of living from elements of different ways of living while still maintaining a sense of identity. Further study of experiences with these methodologies by others in Bhutan and an exploration of the Western research on their benefits would seem to be useful to those attempting to create a school system in Bhutan which is compatible with GNH and also prepares students for Western style higher education.

### **Summary of Interview Findings**

My analysis of the interviews in this chapter provides evidence that there are more similarities than differences in beliefs about and experiences of learning among interviewees from all three groups: those only or first educated by non-Western methodologies, those educated in Bhutan's public schools who also were participants in some type of traditional learning, and those who were educated mainly in Catholic schools in India but also kept a strong connection to their families and Bhutanese heritage. Three common themes emerged across groups: 1) formal learning was seen as related to spiritual/moral development, 2) their experiences of learning were associated with a sense of meaning and personal/internal motivation, and 3) alphabetic literacy was seen to be strongly related to formal learning.

Also common to all groups was participation in some type of non-Western learning methodology, either formally or informally. Almost all the interviewees had experiences with storytelling and memorization while the other methodologies, such as argumentation, apprenticeship, and awareness/perception/intuition training, were only mentioned by some of the participants. The benefits of participation in

these traditional methodologies which were discussed by the interviewees and which I observed were consistent with those discussed in the literature although further study would be required to determine the full extent of the benefits and the ways in which the methodologies interact.

The beliefs and common characteristics of those interviewed resulting from their experiences with traditional, non-western learning methodologies seem to be very compatible with the philosophy of GNH, particularly the belief that one of the main purposes of formal learning is to promote spiritual/moral development. Those working in Bhutan to create an education system aligned with GNH can gain insight into their work through considering the findings of this study related to the dynamics of personal/internal motivation and the relationship of the non-Western learning methodologies to Bhutan's traditional values as well as success in Western education. Further study of both seems warranted and accessible since there is a large population in Bhutan who have had experiences with personally meaningful learning and non-Western learning methodologies. In chapter five I will compare and contrast the experiences of two education organizations in Bhutan related to the challenges and choices they face in their navigation process to create a new form of education which combines elements from traditional and Western ways of living and is aligned with GNH.

## **Chapter Five**

### **EDUCATION IN BHUTAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TWO ORGANIZATIONS: CHALLENGES AND CHOICES**

This chapter will compare and contrast the experiences of two education organizations in Bhutan to address the question: Given the commitment to traditional values, what are some of the challenges faced by two institutions in Bhutan in their navigation process to create a new form of education which combines elements from traditional and Western ways of living and is aligned with GNH, and how are those challenges being addressed as they make crucial choices?

The navigation of different ways of living and learning by organizations or institutions can be considered as both similar to and very different from navigation by individuals depending upon the perspective from which it is seen. This navigation can be looked at with a focus on the choices and goals of the individuals leading an organization, the organization (or the government controlling it) as a bureaucratic entity which has a great deal of power to limit the choices of people attempting to lead it, or the challenges due to social forces external to the organization. All of these perspectives will be considered in my discussion of the navigation of educational change by two organizations involved with education in Bhutan: the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies (ILCS) and the Royal Education Council (REC). I will examine the choices of the leaders, the bureaucratic issues, and the challenges from external social factors. In my analysis of the navigation process of each organization, that process will also be discussed in

relationship to some of the literature on creating a new way of living by combining elements of two ways of living and that on school reform.

### **Data Collection and Methodology**

This aspect of my research also fits well with a qualitative research perspective. I am interested in the lived experiences of the members of these organizations who are guiding them through the navigation of education change. However, I did not begin this phase of my research with prepared questions. As I stated in the introduction, I did not originally intend to study education institutions or organizations in Bhutan but planned to focus on the experiences of individuals with non-Western learning methodologies. From my reading, I had identified a few people I hoped to interview but mainly depended on our guide to find and arrange interviews with appropriate people for me. I shared with him my interest in traditional learning methodologies in Bhutan, and he proceeded to set up several interviews with some of the individuals discussed in the previous chapter. He also arranged one of my first interviews with the director of the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies (ILCS), Lungtaen Gyatso, because the ILCS uses many traditional methodologies and a monastic curriculum while also being a part of the Royal University of Bhutan. Through this interview I became aware that the ILCS was a very interesting example of the attempt to create a new form of education by adding to the Bhutanese monastic system those Western education elements that meet the needs of the changing society in Bhutan and seem compatible with the traditional system.

In the interview, Lopen Gyatso began by sharing about the methodologies and curriculum of the ILCS. I did not ask him about his own personal learning experiences but asked many questions about the history and current situation of the ILCS and its navigation process as it has gone through many different forms of existence. At that point, I realized that it is difficult for individuals to learn through traditional methodologies if there are no institutions using those methodologies, so I decided to include the investigation of the navigation process of the ILCS in my research. I have been able to obtain more details on this process through follow-up questions by e-mail to Lopen Gyatso.

As far as my decision to include the navigation process of the Royal Education Council in my research, that also developed while I was in Bhutan. I had read an article by Tashi Wangyal (2001) about whether the Bhutanese education system can ensure the intergenerational transmission of values in which he discussed some of the traditional learning methodologies, so I asked our guide to arrange an interview with him. When I met him for the interview, I found out that he had recently been asked by the fifth king to be part of the Royal Education Council (REC), a body whose purpose is to reform Bhutan's education system so it is aligned with GNH. I interviewed him about his own personal navigation of Bhutanese and Western education systems as I had planned but also spent a substantial part of the interview time asking questions about the work of the REC as it was trying to develop an education system that was true to traditional Bhutanese values while also preparing students to function in the modern world.

I decided to research the navigation of the REC further and was able to begin e-mail conversations with two other members of the REC, Gyaltshen (Getse) Penjor and Sangay Jamtsho, after I returned home from Bhutan. Then in October of 2008 Tashi, Getse, and Sangay and a fourth member of the REC, Chencho Lhamu, came to Santa Barbara to discuss a relationship with UCSB. I was able to have individual conversations with them and to be part of taking them to visit various campus departments and two local public schools. I also attended a reception and a meeting where they shared more about the work of the REC. I have continued to ask follow-up questions by e-mail of these four members of the REC since their return to Bhutan and have also been corresponding with a fifth member who is in charge of establishing beacon schools.

### **Navigation Of Educational Change By The ILCS**

An example of an institution that has navigated many changes during its existence since 1961 is the ILCS. The ILCS was originally established as Semtokha Lopdra, the first monastic school for laypeople in Bhutan, and is now part of the Royal University of Bhutan. The many changes which the ILCS has gone through exemplify many of the past and current issues that education institutions in Bhutan have had to deal with as they have navigated the many changes in Bhutanese society throughout the last fifty years.

In looking at the history of ILCS, I spoke briefly with my interviewee from the previous chapter Dasho Shinkhar Lama about his part in the founding of Semtokha Lopdra when he served as a secretary of the second and third kings. I also gained

some information from the website of ILCS. However, as stated earlier, I received most of my information from an interview and e-mail correspondence with Lopen Lungtaen Gyatso, the current director of ILCS. Before Lopen Gyatso became involved in the navigation process of the ILCS, he himself had navigated several types of education systems. In an e-mail, he shared about his education as follows: “I did my schooling in Bhutan up to class VIII. Then I left for India to study Buddhism in South India and Sanskrit in Central India from 1980-1998.”

### **Early History of the ILCS**

The original form of the ILCS, Semtokha Lopdra, was one of the oldest schools in Bhutan. It was located in the Dzong (fort and administrative center) about eight kilometers above the city of Thimphu. It was established in 1961 by the third king as a monastic school for laypeople at the same time as he was developing the modern secular education system in Bhutan. Lopen Gyatso spoke in detail about this time as follows:

The third king was maintaining the traditional while introducing modern education. That was the situation behind introducing the school, but this was less organized...because you know there were no set rules or criteria for education. There was no age limit...so the students were in the beginning – you know – from all walks of life. Some were retired army personnel – some were disrobed monks – villagers – and still some young children coming to study. So there were diverse groups of people learning.

Dasho Shingkar Lama also described the students at this time:

Initially it was started with just male students...It was only much later that women came to that school...were all lay people. There were monks who were teaching...There were twenty of them (male students) from all over the place – first opportunity to do this. They used to live in dorms for thirty days at a time.

After describing the students, Lopen Gyatso explained how the institute originally functioned:

It was more set up – a tutorial setup thing....There was no grading system – there were no examinations as such. It was left to the sheer interest of the students to decide – you know – what to learn and what not to learn. No formal tests were conducted, but they were very much committed and therefore they learned – because today we see some of the scholars are the product of those days.

He went on to make a comparison between current students and those early students which relates to the discussion in the previous chapter about the experience of meaning and personal/ internal motivation by those learning before the introduction of a Western schooling model with its required attendance and focus on future employment:

These people really learned because things were not what it is today. They had to travel months from their homes to get here. And they really you know felt the value of time – and you know – coming to this school and then studying which now the students are not really living that. We are imposing for them to study.

### **Current Situation of ILCS**

Before discussing the process of change, I will describe the current status of the ILCS. It is now one of the founding institutes of the Royal University of Bhutan. The ILCS website provides some basic information about its mission and programs:

- Mission:
- Produce modern Bhutanese citizens with traditional knowledge
  - To be the centre of excellence for higher learning in Language, Culture and Buddhist Studies
- Aims:
- To preserve and promote the tradition and culture through the study of Languages, Logic, Indigenous Medicine, Arts and Crafts, Astrology, Bhutanese History, Buddhist Philosophy, etc.
  - To promote the National Language Dzongkha

- To promote graduates with proficiency in both Dzongkha and English
- To facilitate regional and international scholars to study Bhutanese Languages, Art, and Culture
- Demonstrate competency to orchestrate any cultural activity, be it at the institute or at the national level
- To be the centre for documentation and preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (partially funded by UNESCO)

Programmes: - A two-year Higher Secondary School Certificate  
 - A three-year Bachelor's Degree in Language and Culture

Lopen Gyatso provided more details about how the ILCS currently

functions during my interview with him. He shared first about the language aspect:

Basically we are dealing with Bhutanese languages...just focusing on two – Dzongkha, our national language and then the textual language which is common to the entire Himalayan – India region – you know – the language of the Buddhist literature in the Himalayan region, including Tibet....And we also do teach English. Almost – like forty percent of our curriculum is taught in English whereas the rest – sixty percent are taught in Dzongkha and Chokey....We are following the same English curriculum that is offered in other schools. In addition ...we teach students how to translate things, how to integrate things.

He went on to describe in more detail what is taught related to cultural studies at ILCS:

Then on the cultural side we teach all kinds of Bhutanese - you know – on cultural subjects – songs and music... teach traditional architecture. We also teach medicine, but ours is not the advanced course but we are preparing students for the National Institute of Traditional Medicine ....we can teach weaving and design – then painting and iconography – then Bhutanese etiquette – these are some of the cultural areas.

### **Navigation of the Changes Experienced by the ILCS**

Interspersed with Lopen Gyatso's descriptions of the history and current form of the ILCS were narratives about the process of navigation of the many changes the ILCS has experienced and still is experiencing. The process of change has involved

a combination of external decisions by the government education bureaucracy and internal decisions by ILCS leaders about how to implement those decisions as well as fulfill their own goals of maintaining traditional values and curriculum while dealing with challenges due to external social factors. Although Lopen Gyatso described the changes made by the Ministry of Education and those driven by external forces in society, he seemed to emphasize the freedom and ability of the leaders of ILCS to make their own decisions about how to navigate these changes.

After describing the early days of the Institute, he spoke of the first changes:

And so it functioned that way for several years I suppose – until the early seventies. Then when modern education got fully grounded, then they thought of this institute as a school. And then started the education ministry....when education took over, they really wanted to streamline everything....the courses were formalized....Somewhere before 1980 they structured the whole curriculum, and it was more academic in nature. And the examination system was introduced in the late eighties.

Continuing his description of changes related to the ILCS, Lopen Gyatso explained that with modernization there was a need for Bhutanese scholars from the institute to communicate with the world outside Bhutan:

These people were not able to communicate with the outside world despite their knowledge....So then the government said I think now traditional knowledge alone for the Bhutanese – to a large extent it's okay but now if we have to interact with people, we have to introduce English in the curriculum....Then the Education Ministry almost – you know – overhauled the whole curriculum. And then English was introduced as a language in 1997.

Most of the changes mentioned so far came about because of decisions by the government Ministry of Education, but the next change mentioned by Lopen Gyatso which is currently happening has been more of an internal decision which is related

to the education needs of students brought about by changes in Bhutanese society.

Lopen Gyatso explained the change this way:

To now...our traditional curriculum is more book-driven – more teacher-centered...so we are more or less feeding the students, and we are not encouraging the students to learn on their own. So now we are taking another step...we are moving away from the text-book driven curriculum to student-centered curriculum which means now the curriculum would require students to do a lot of reading, collecting, referencing – you know – reading books and then getting back to the curriculum – sort of interacting with it...We are just polishing the curriculum at the moment and hopefully by 2009 – July – we will be able to offer this new course.... We are also working on the curriculum for the Master's level.... for the Royal University of Bhutan, this institute will be the first to offer Master's courses.

The faculty members at ILCS have had to make a major shift in their way of teaching with the adoption of this more student-centered learning model while still using the traditional monastic curriculum. Lopen Gyatso described this shift:

Things are really changing. I had a very difficult time in convincing the faculty to introduce a new curriculum which is more student-centered...because they are all products of this traditional monastic way....That's the drawback in the monastic system because there is no room for questioning....Now I think I am happy that all my colleagues share the same opinion, and they are more into it – they are more free and open to discourse...This curriculum demands more of an analytical approach toward teaching...the teacher should be aware of the resources in book form, in electronic form....So it might take a little time to settle down, but the good thing is the curriculum is being developed by ourselves and lot of thinking has been put into it right from the beginning.

In a follow-up e-mail, I asked Lopen Gyatso to explain more about the reasons for this change to a student-centered model. He responded this way:

Shift from the earlier teacher-centered curriculum to student-centered curriculum was basically the institute's initiative. The ILCS is more or less following the traditional monastic curriculum. This model of education entails long years of rigorous teaching /learning. Monastics have time to study for many years because this itself is their profession... They are not time bound

at least in terms of completion of the course....But when the same model is followed by contemporary lay students who are more oriented for job market, time is very limited, and therefore, effort has to be made from both ends: teacher-student – to make learning effective within a short period of time. So the mode of study (teaching/ learning) has to be changed. This is why we have initiated the change.

Another change the ILCS is currently planning is a change in physical location. Several years after its founding ,the institute moved from the Dzong a short distance to its current location. This space is small and located in a hilly area with no space for expansion while the number of students desiring to come is increasing. Lopen Gyatso addressed the plans for this move:

The government decided to relocate the Institute and the – now we have just finished the architectural drawing of the new Institute which will be in Trongsa – six hours away from here... Hopefully by the end of 2010 we should be in a position to move to the new location which is just barren land at the moment.... So this is what we are and already we have 350 student strength that we teach and we have 32 faculty and altogether 57 including the support staff....But when we move to the new location, we are planning to accommodate at least 750 and from there to 1200 students so the buildings that are developed are meant for this many students.

He later expressed some frustration that discussions about the relocation had taken so long:

Talks were going on....We have been waiting and waiting. It didn't happen.... Now the development's here....We are barely functioning in our old capacity. So many things have changed, but the structure – the infrastructure has not changed. Our library facilities are not good. The faculty rooms are not good. Computer labs are not adequate. So with all these structures we are pretty much saying we have done our best – to the best of our ability so that we can – we can still improve a lot more – lot more.

Lopen Gyatso went on to explain that all the students at the new location will be boarding students provided free housing and food by the government. Then in

answer to my question, he explained why the number of students desiring to come to the ILCS is increasing:

When I first came here (1999), not many students preferred to come and study Dzongkha because to many Dzongkha is treated something like Sanskrit in India or maybe Latin and Greek in Europe....it's a very old archived sort of language so people were not really interested. But then what really happened is the government has got a very strong hold on the policy – the language policy. No matter what, the government says – Dzongkha should be preserved and promoted. At least that's there on paper, and then recently what happened was our students who studied here did not have that much difficulty in getting jobs....Our students did not have difficulty getting jobs for two grounds. One the government policy of having Dzongkha – even in some of the offices they are asked to – you know – deal with all kinds of correspondences in Dzongkha....and, therefore, there are not many people who are competent in doing that....and then the students who learn here can understand and communicate in English as well.

He went on to describe another change in government policy which relates to the increase in the number of students coming to ILCS:

Then later on the recruitment system in the government changed....The Royal Service Commission said whoever wants to join the government sector after completing their undergrads, they have to sit for a common exam. Dzongkha is one section. There is general knowledge on social economy development – then one on general knowledge, one on histories .....every student no matter their grounds – like engineers, doctors - was tested....And there things went very well again – like almost 40-50 percent of our students ranked at the top. Then that was a very big sort of thing that really made people think about the Institute, and they thought now I think this is the Institute where we can – you know – get good jobs. Of course, people who are – not the cream – the cream doesn't really come here because the cream of the students always go for engineering or medicine. These are the top things. Minus that I think the rest are our supporters so that's a good development. People have been thinking to join us.

After sharing about the increase in student enrollment and their positive experiences in finding employment, we discussed one problem with which many students come to the ILCS and which the faculty must consider while trying to help.

students gain expertise. This is related to knowledge of Dzongkha. He explained one of the reasons for the low level of skill in Dzongkha:

They are supposed to have already studied Dzongkha in school but the kind of Dzongkha knowledge they come with – we are not happy....So we are having a rough time reorienting them – and you know – making them learn Dzongkha which was not a stronghold in the schools....they are more comfortable in English than in Dzongkha. (When asked why) Several factors. One factor would be the quality of teachers because in Bhutan education – teaching profession is the last choice....The real reason is more work for the same pay. Somebody just coming out of the university.... one joining the teaching profession, another joining a general office – they are put at the same rate. Their basic – their salary is the same, but the amount of work the teacher needs to do is much more.

He then went on to give the second and third reasons:

Another one is there is no tangible benefit of learning Dzongkha. The fact that the government says – ah, national language is our identity. We need to preserve it but then what happens is – nothing happen when people don't know Dzongkha or not – because you get Harvard students, you get Oxford students – don't know that. They don't know Dzongkha. So there is no disadvantage in not knowing Dzongkha....and , of course, other things – because Dzongkha is just one hour a day and the rest of the subjects are taught in English.

### **Analysis of the Navigation Process of the ILCS**

In order to gain a sense of all the aspects of the navigation process of the ILCS, I would need to speak with other faculty and staff members at the ILCS. However, since Lopen Gyatso is the director and a faculty member, his interview provides an important perspective on this process. I will look at his interview to determine themes and to discuss it in light of some of the literature.

There is a definite sense in the interview that navigation is occurring at the ILCS. Lopen Gyatso expresses an awareness of the ILCS's having and actively making

choices which are related to its goals and also responsive to social changes and governmental policies. He uses terms like “was basically the Institute’s initiative,” “we are moving onto the right track,” and “being developed by ourselves” many times. Although modernization is a force from outside that has impacted Bhutan, the focus is on conscious choices made by the ILCS in concert with the government of Bhutan about how to deal with this force in a way that maintains Bhutanese values and culture while also interacting with the rest of the world.

The response of the ILCS to the forces of modern development involves what Bohannan (1995) has called recontexting. As Lopen Gyatso shared in his interview, there has been an attempt to establish the ILCS as a new form of education which is part of the Royal University and maintains a foundation based on the traditional values and monastic curriculum of the Institute while incorporating new elements such as a more student-centered pedagogy, the English language, and technology. This process of the ILCS is also shown in the interview to involve the flexibility in thinking mentioned in the literature as necessary for creating a way of education which includes both the old and the new.

The government is rarely mentioned as a bureaucratic oppositional force to the ILCS in this interview. In fact, the only frustration about the government expressed was the complaint that it was so slow in facilitating the move to a new location. The Ministry of Education is basically seen as responding to the same outside forces due to modernization to which the ILCS and all other elements of Bhutanese society have had to adjust. The government is viewed as supportive of the goals of the ILCS to

preserve Bhutanese culture and continue to use a monastic curriculum since the government has declared its goal to be an education system aligned with GNH which maintains traditional values and customs while also preparing people to be able to function in the larger world.

Most of the changes made by the ILCS are described in the interview in positive terms as gains coming from addition of new elements to the traditional foundation. However, there is one loss related to the current learning situation at the ILCS which is mentioned with no clear plan as to how to restore it proposed. This is the sense of meaning and personal/internal motivation to learn which was exhibited by earlier students at the Institute and by those I interviewed and described in the previous chapter. Lopen Gyatso spoke of that time when students had a strong personal motivation to learn with nostalgia and longing, saying this is not the situation today. He also described one of the reasons for the low level of competence in Dzongkha as being related to the lack of external benefit for learning it and people's having little internal motivation to learn it. He mentioned the government's attempts to change the situation but in contrast to other problem areas did not seem to have a clear idea of what to do about restoring a sense of meaning and personal motivation in learning. This issue related to public school students will be addressed in the next sections on school reform in Bhutan.

### **Public School Reform Before the REC**

School development and reform in Bhutan were carried out by the Ministry of Education until the establishment of the REC in August of 2007 when it was given

the task of providing a plan for school reform to align the public school system with GNH. Before I go to my research focus on the REC, I want to discuss earlier school reform in Bhutan from the perspective of two of my interviewees from the previous chapter. Tashi Wangyal and Ashi Choden.

As already mentioned, Tashi Wangyal previously worked in the government ministries of finance and foreign affairs and is now a member of the REC. He spoke about previous reform efforts related to declining learning standards in Bhutan:

Teacher says, ‘Oh, the English standards are weak. We want to fix the English curriculum.’ Then they say, ‘Oh, the students are poor in math.’ Then they try to go and do something about the math curriculum. Every time it was driven by external consultants....You cannot have all these done in isolation. (In response to question about reform related to values education) Oh, I think that is like most of the interventions. To a problem requiring major surgery, people have often resorted to applying band aid solutions.

As already stated, Ashi Choden has worked as a teacher in Bhutan and has served on government commissions on education reform. In her interview she gave her perspective on education changes in Bhutan and described her recent experience of serving on a government education reform commission:

(Referring to the experience of education in Bhutan before Western schooling) Thinking back it becomes much more valuable than when we were living it. And I think we have lost a lot again because we went to the West and we were somewhat ashamed of what we had as something backward. I think that was happening all over the world. Traditional culture is exposed to a more dominant and aggressive culture....It’s a learning process, and Bhutanese are beginning to question that not everything others do will do for us.

(Answering my question of what would her definition of education or learning be) The word that sticks in my head is wholesome because we’ve

just finished a commission report on that. The quality of education – it’s wholesome education...that’s the word they used. (After a question about the Dzongkha word for wholesome and a discussion about the word’s connection to health and holistic in English) I don’t really know...What is a healthy education? But going back to the wholesome – I always asked, ‘What does it mean, why do we have to do it?’ I believe it’s because we had some British consultants and they like that word and finally at one time they were also striving for a wholesome education....I think it’s a very useful concept to look into the situation because – I think that is where we have a disconnect because we are using wholesome in English and we don’t really know what it means.

### **Establishment and Goals of the REC**

As already stated, the Royal Education Council (REC) was established quite recently when the fifth king brought together a number of people to work on the reform of the school system in order to align it with GNH in August of 2007. The members of the REC have varied backgrounds. Of the four I met, Getse Penjor and Tashi Wangyal have degrees related to economics and government service experience in finance and foreign affairs. Sangay Jamtsho and Chencho Lhamu have degrees in education and experience in teaching and teacher training. Since the REC is so new, it is still mainly in the stage of research and development. It is not intended to be an ongoing bureaucratic education institution but a temporary organization to facilitate school reform. As the REC members who visited UCSB shared, when they succeed in their work, their jobs will cease to exist. Currently the REC does have to work in coordination with a bureaucracy, the government Ministry of Education. The relationship between the two is still in the process of officially being described, but REC member Sangay Jamtsho gave me this answer by e-mail in response to my question about the relationship between the REC and the Ministry of

## Education:

Your question about the relationship between REC and Ministry of Education is an interesting one. We are actually in the process of working on it and had a series of discussions with the ministry. At this point we see ourselves as collaborators to achieve the same goals although it will be important to have some more clarity on how our roles will be different and similar. At REC, based on His Majesty's command, we see ourselves primarily as a group dedicated towards initiating change which the ministry may find it difficult to do as it struggles with running the system. In some ways we see ourselves as launching the beta versions (use computer software lingo) so that the ministry can launch the final versions. In the end, whatever REC does must be of relevance to the ministry or education system in Bhutan. This of course is my view. We don't as yet have an official document that explains the relationship but will probably have one very soon.

Although there is this movement toward cooperation between the REC and the Ministry of Education, there were also statements made by interviewees which demonstrate there is some tension between some of those in the bureaucracy and the reformers. Ashi Choden shared about some resistance to reform efforts:

I think what's happened in education – the building up of the modern education system in here – is that we are doing quite well – from 11 schools to come to 500 and some institutions – so they are always saying about how we are doing so well. But it's only about a year ago that it became a topic of discussion – even last National Assembly – something is wrong with education system. We have an education system but do we have the quality. So quality of education came under scrutiny and a lot of the players who were there for a long time are finding it very difficult to accept the fact that there is something wrong.

REC member Tashi Wangyal also described resistance to acknowledge the problem areas by those in the system:

And my idea is unless we come about and we acknowledge that there is a problem – it is an insufficient system – we aren't going to get any money – you see. If you keep on thinking that everything is fine and dandy, the treasury is not going to allocate any dollars to the education system but you have to acknowledge that there is a price developing the education system – then maybe the government can allocate more resources.... The ministry has said before

everything is fine at the policy level but send their children – it's usually a private school.

This acknowledging of problems and the initiating of change is a large part of the mission of the REC. I have gotten most of my information about the REC from several conversations with five of the members of the REC about their mission and current work. Some of these have been in person and others by e-mail, including a lengthy interview with Tashi Wangyal when I was in Bhutan. In addition, I gained a more official statement of their mission and work from the formal presentations given by the four members who visited Santa Barbara in October of 2008. I also have learned a few things from the REC website, but it currently provides only minimal information as most of its pages are still under construction.

### **Overview of the Work of the REC**

I will begin with an overview of the REC from the formal presentation by Gyaltshen (Getse) Penjor at GGSE on October 17, 2008 and then present what I have learned from conversations with the members of the REC. After first sharing that the REC has a focus on research which examines the problems of education in Bhutan, such as low student achievement, unclear standards and poor teacher quality, with a view toward distinguishing between causes of the problems and symptoms, Getse discussed the work of the REC by asking and answering three questions:

1. *What is the mission of the education system?* Very broadly the mission of the system proposed by the REC is to empower every Bhutanese to be a successful lifelong learner, including community, political, social, and economic aspects. There is a need to emphasize all students. Not all students have equal abilities, so the focus should be on each person achieving his or her full potential. We want to assure high student learning and achievement also in terms of values

and character which are important ingredients to make up a good quality education for a child.

2. *What system can achieve the mission goals?* In discussion with outside partners of Bhutan we decided to look first at classrooms, then schools, and then interventions. We feel that if it isn't happening in the classroom, it isn't happening anywhere. We decided to provide support for the classroom and so to ask: What does the system need to ensure this?
3. *What are the specific interventions that are needed?* There are four strategic reforms the REC has recommended to the government for public schools:
  - (a) Curriculum reform needs to be comprehensive, not just one subject at a time. This includes looking at standards reform like in the U.S. and examining how education goals should be linked to our national goals.
  - (b) In our case most important is to align this reform with teacher standards and resources. This needs to be comprehensive, looking at not just good training but also the need to provide motivation by looking at working conditions and pay for teachers. For providing good training we are working on establishing a new teacher training institute by 2010.
  - (c) Reform takes time so we need to institute a system that provides adequate objective feedback on how the reform is going.
  - (d) We need to establish new beacon schools as models and then based on the success of those schools make broad recommendations to the government. We need more than one model not one size fits all.

Getse then went on to delineate what interventions the REC is working on for higher education. He stated that the goal of the REC is to strongly align school education with higher education. He explained that technological education is critical at the current time and needs to be given priority and that the biggest challenge as part of the master plan is for the REC to actually establish a new university in Bhutan which would take students from Bhutan, the region, and other places.

## **Specific Aspects of the Work of the REC**

The statements made in the overview presentation are quite general, so I will continue by developing some of the points through using conversations with and e-mails from REC members. I will examine five aspects mentioned in the presentation and one not specifically mentioned.

### (1) Standards and Assessments

Getse made several comments about the importance of adequate standards in his presentation. He clarified the relationship of standards to testing/assessment in answer to a question after his presentation:

Now students will be assessed in years 4, 6, and 8 by the end of March. From this we will establish a baseline so that after five years we can go back and look at it. This isn't a high stakes exam. It's not like standardized testing here. Assessment should be more in support of learning not punishment for not meeting standards.

Tashi also discussed standards and testing in my interview with him in March of 2008:

Well, the examination part will really be formatted as a critical aspect of the changing mindset of – mindset of parents, mindset of students, and mindset of policymakers. And I think one thing we have to realize is that parents are keen to see test scores – parents are keen to see A,B,C,D or 90% or my kid scored – So that is there....At the moment standards as such are not really clear – like they are driven by textbooks. Therefore, by default tests are necessary. So once we have standards – at least minimum standards – that on completion of grade 3 a child should know 3-digit multiplication and be able to divide –you know – this kind of fractions – a kind of automatic progression for the child – not just for the sake of going to the next grade but intellectual progression – mental progression – all these are. So for our purposes of reform, we haven't really talked in the reform process whether to do away with tests or not because it doesn't work in this situation without changing a parent's mindset. It's not in a way that the council (REC) tells people. We are supposed to have our own magnet schools as beacon schools where we can show reforms taking place.

## (2) Values Education

Several statements about the importance of including values education in the curriculum in the reform process have already been given from Getse's presentation and quotes in the previous chapter from Ashi Choden and Tashi Wangyal. I will add some additional statements by Tashi Wangyal about values education in the work of the REC:

The work we are doing now with education reform we are going to do this – first take a much more comprehensive approach to values education – not just have a class for values education every week and have a teacher who teaches values but to be integrated in the texts – maybe English or history – lot of good articles – most of the values – say Buddhist values – are universal values – There's a whole host of materials out there....getting the best of both worlds – engaging them in a manner that is engaging and has some relevance to the modern context.

The inclusion of values as part of educational reform is also an integral part of the work of the REC to align education in Bhutan with GNH. A development policy based upon traditional Buddhist values is the core of GNH. Some statements related to that were made by REC members. Tashi Wangyal explained that the REC wanted to have a description of the values of GNH to use in their work:

The other thing we have just completed is to invite the experts from the Centre for Bhutan Studies who have done a comprehensive survey on GNH – so now the challenge we have given them is to come up with a fifteen page booklet on the core values for GNH....And so we will certainly look at those again ...at whatever level it's appropriate – you know – people are developing texts and all that. We will try to integrate it. So it is a matter of deep interest and concern as we finish these reforms.

Sangay Jamtsho also addressed the topic of GNH and values in the education reform work of the REC:

While our focus is on reforms to promote education that is geared toward creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and the like in preparation for new realities, at REC we do consider it important to maintain our traditional values. More importantly, we are seriously thinking of how to align education with the idea of Gross National Happiness.

### (3) Student-Centered Education

Another focus of the work of the REC is to develop an education system which is student-centered and provides a way for every student to develop his or her full potential. Getse addressed this point in his presentation and also in an e-mail (July 27, 2008) which was in reply to my question of how and why Bhutan became interested in student-centered education. He presented four points:

- (a) The only reason schools and the rest of the paraphernalia (be it ministries of education, teachers, books, training institutes, etc.) exist is because of students. They are the only client. However, the reality is that the system often forgets that and policies inevitably end up being driven by various other considerations that are not necessarily linked to the interest of the student. However, if we keep the student at the center and work backwards, the probability of a clear alignment of policies, pedagogy, books, etc. with the real objective i.e. student learning not just for a select few but for all students/children would be possible.
- (b) There is a need for a paradigm shift in society's perceptions about a child's ability to achieve in school...The council's mission and vision is based on the premise that all children can and must achieve their full potential...However, unless we adopt a child centered approach to education, the system lands up with a one size fits all policy and shifts the blame for low performing students to causes ranging from natural ability, inherent inequities, teachers, etc. We perpetuate a vicious cycle of low expectations and low achievement for most of our students. We assume that all children learn the same way and at the same pace. However, I am sure you will agree there is significant evidence to the contrary. Thus a child centered approach as a government policy would compel the system to invest more time and resources in developing the requisite programs to ensure that all our children succeed i.e. leave the school system with a much higher level of achievement than what is expected today.

- (c) A vital imperative for a child centered approach is to promote creativity and innovation in education. I am not an educationist, but my common sense tells me that unless one has a silver bullet theory or program in education it is better to encourage diversity and a fusion of mean tested best practices from diverse schools of thought. As far as I can see this is an infinite process as education, whether pedagogy, content, curriculum, etc. will continuously need to evolve as society evolves.
- (d) Another reason is to view education of our children as an investment for the the future of our society and not as a social obligation alone. Obligation tends to lead to minimal investment in terms of resources, access rather than access to quality, and little effort in true measurement of a student's ability.

Tashi Wangyal also shared about this REC goal of student-centered learning when I interviewed him:

In our reform I think that what we are trying to do is also to insure that education is thoughtful –in the shape of human knowing. In addition to the family is the school. If you are sure it is rigorous and relevant and interesting to the child – I think that is the secret of education. A lot of teachers have basically chalk and talk. The teacher comes and turns his back to the kid who looks at everyone else's back – no interaction. So instead of enjoying, everybody is there to just listen to the sermon of the day....Teachers look to see how much time is on the clock. So we would like to change some of those aspects. ...Sometimes we are not well aware that not everybody – you know – is good in math, physics, English, economics. They may be inclined toward the arts. They may want to take technical training. So we would like to provide those opportunities for people to excel in their own areas – and looking at a certain degree of fine development. The way we see it now we consider everyone is going to go to college. But the fact is – you know – not everyone's really interested in that way. So these are the things we feel are important: to insure that every child is special, that people have different talents and natural abilities..

#### (4) Models/Beacon Schools

The establishment of beacon schools by the REC was mentioned by Getse in his presentation and in quotes from Tashi and Getse already presented. The REC recognizes that it cannot force school reform on the people of Bhutan who have now come to associate economic success with school success and know only the current

models of “chalk and talk” schooling or monastic schooling. The REC is trying to help people navigate between the current models and a student-centered model by developing beacon schools that showcase student-centered practices which can demonstrate their value to parents and students. Members of the REC have been researching best practices all over the world. Currently the REC is focusing on primary level education and has chosen two programs in India as models: Riverside School and iDiscoveri Preschools. These models are considered to be excellent examples of student-centered education. I will give an overview of these programs from information on their websites and then present comments by a member of the REC and two Bhutanese principals and a teacher in private schools who have attended trainings at Riverside School.

The iDiscoveri Preschools program has schools in several locations in India. This program serves children from the ages of two to six. Getse Penjor described it as one of the models being used by the REC as it prepares to create beacon schools. The iDiscoveri Preschool website provides this information about the program:

- Our Belief: We believe that every child is unique in thought and action, should be allowed to develop at his or her own pace, and be appreciated for it.
- Environment: We are a green preschool with a daily practice of the 3 R’s; Reduce, Recycle, Reuse. The child is central to every activity with the aim of inculcating the habit of protecting our environment.
- Culture: We believe in freedom as essential to learning so the culture is one in which children explore. We work at building a partnership with families.
- Curriculum: Our curriculum is built around the most recent evidence from

child psychology, brain based research, and the experience of leading practitioners. It draws from Western and Eastern educational philosophy, including the works of Sri Aurobindo, Howard Gardner, J. Krishnamurthy, Reggio Emilia, Maria Montessori, and our own work with children over the past ten years.

- Mentors: Our mentors are trained facilitators in the classroom, always ready to assist and direct. Their purpose is to stimulate the child's enthusiasm for learning and to guide it without interfering with the child's natural desire to become independent. We maintain a teacher child ratio of 1:10.

The Riverside School is located in Ahmedabad, India. Bhutan is planning to open a beacon school based on this school as a model in 2010. The Riverside School serves children from pre-kindergarten to Grade 7. The school website provides the following general information:

**Philosophy:** Riverside School is a co-educational school created around a philosophy of "Roots-Froots." Riverside believes in providing children with inputs and an environment that integrates individual and group, learning and playing, knowledge and values, reasoning and creativity, along with discipline and freedom into a seamless mix of experiences, discoveries, and structured inputs.

**Pedagogy:** The Stage 1 program centers around the age groups 2 to 7, which are the most crucial and sensitive years of a child's growth and development. The program uses Multiple Intelligences theory as the bedrock of its instruction, and assessment with the goal of keeping the student as the stakeholder. The Stage 2 program centers around the age group of 8 to 12. Students at this level are given exposure to authentic experiences such as Child-Rights and internships at real world professional setting from grades 5-7. The Stage 2 students mentor the stage 1 students.

A number of Bhutanese administrators and teachers have spent time visiting or participating in training programs at Riverside School and its director Kiran Sethi has visited the REC in Bhutan. REC head Getse Penjor has been very supportive of the model and mentioned it positively several times in e-mails and conversations,

even offering to arrange a visit there for me. REC member Sangay Jamtsho was one of those who visited Riverside in 2008. He shared about his experience while at Riverside in a newspaper interview for the April 19, 2008 edition of The Times of India:

Our country has a conventional approach to learning. We have a set curriculum for each grade which we adhere to strictly. It is the teachers who do most of the work, but at Riverside it's completely opposite. The learner's at the centre stage and the teachers are just facilitators. Another important aspect we need to focus on is the student-teacher ratio. We are learning many things every day, and my effort would be to communicate the same to the teachers who undergo the training in Bhutan so the students are competent in the global market.

Sangay shared more with me about his experience and attempts to implement the Riverside model in Bhutan as one of the model beacon schools in an e-mail in response to my questions about Riverside:

We are looking at alternative models. Riverside is very impressive and very much on the progressive side. A lot of things we saw at Riverside are implementation of what we teach at the Colleges of Education here in Bhutan. I even think that our teachers may be even better at talking about them but definitely not in doing it. The trouble is it's so very hard to change the prevalent school culture and the mindset. We are considering model schools that use good learner-centered practices such as that of Riverside that would serve as models for others to emulate. This is with the hope that it will be easier to change people's mindset if they can see something happen for real.

Although the REC is looking at and discussing models for beacon schools, none have yet been founded according to an e-mail I received on February 12, 2009 from Phuntsho Dukpa, the REC member in charge of the beacon school project. He explained the current situation:

As of now we have none. We are planning to open schools in the future. As for the Riverside School model, some of the schools will try out the model but at present nothing concrete so far has taken off.

Phuntsho went on to give me the names of two private school administrators and three private school teachers who had had Riverside training. I contacted them to ask them about their training at Riverside and to find out if they were using it in Bhutan. I received an e-mail response from the two administrators and one teacher. I will first present the response of Deki Choden, the Principal and Proprietor of the Early Childhood Learning Center. She described her experiences at Riverside and her current attempts to introduce the practices she learned there to her teachers and to evaluate with them which ones can be implemented at her school. She began by sharing her attitude during this navigation process in answer to my question about whether Riverside is a good model for Bhutan now:

Please note that these are my personal views and while I may try and incorporate some of the good practices I've seen at Riverside at my school, I cannot at this point state that it is or is not a good model for Bhutan – obviously there are many factors to consider before one can make such an assertion. Besides I will have to see how successful we are in trying out some of the practices that seem to work wonderfully at Riverside.

Deki went on to write about some of her take-aways from the four week leadership program she attended at Riverside. This included part of what she had shared with the REC in her report to them. She gave this description of the learning at Riverside which she observed:

At Riverside, students do not use textbooks – rather lessons are planned in relation to Multiple Intelligences Theory whereby children's learning is aligned to learning embedded in real life. So instead of studying different subjects, students are taken through a journey of learning that entertains their choice and voice and addresses the various beacons of learning that enable the honing of the various skill areas such as linguistic, logical thinking, creative, inter- intra-personal, scientific thinking, etc. Also nothing is taught without first ensuring that the students understand the

‘why’ of learning something so there is total engagement! Assessment and evaluation is built into the learning process. Through various programs, the school ensures that the process of learning is made visible to all the stakeholders at frequent intervals. Peer and public scrutiny, student led conferences, assembly performances....and a myriad of other practices are in place where students have many opportunities to demonstrate their understanding which is deep as well as broad.

Deki then shared one of her personal insights from the training:

One of the big insights for me as a school leader was the clear distinction between management and leadership at Riverside. More often than not, practitioners assume the role of manager and focus their energies away from being instructional leaders... Can we ‘teach’ more, ‘train’ more, and ‘do’ the things we tell our teachers to do so we actually ‘walk the talk’ and know what we’re talking about because we’ve practiced it ourselves and know that to be possible

She next described the ongoing learning of the teachers and other adults at

Riverside:

We were informed that the teachers there work 53 more days beyond the 200 odd instructional days to train, plan, update and upgrade their skills as practitioners....’High Quality’ adult learning is going on at Riverside in a big way. ...The teachers and adults are constantly in the process of maximizing their potential in order to maximize the potential of their students, working towards their ultimate goal of providing high quality student learning.

Deki then turned the discussion to what she was doing in Bhutan as she shared her experiences at Riverside with her teachers:

Even as I write this, we are in the midst of our Adult Learning at ELC.... Given that most of our teachers are untrained and often with less than the first degree, Adult Learning has always been an integral part of our school’s calendar of activities....The shift, however, will be in making it an ongoing process, parallel to student learning so that we can enhance the quality of our professional development and take it through more exciting avenues, introducing our adult learners to best practices around the world....Well into the sixth day of our workshop, I am happy to share that the response has been tremendous. Nothing will be imposed,

The house will endorse the various practices that we decide to incorporate after a) seeing their relevance and b) we've rigorously worked out the practicality in implementation and then go all out to put them to practice.

Deki ended the e-mail as she began it by a reminder that she was still in the process of seeing how the Riverside model would work out in Bhutan:

Again these are my personal views and I would not want these to be translated to mean that I fully endorse it for Bhutan – I have yet to see how we can incorporate these practices within the current setup that we have. Besides we have a long way to go in terms of bringing about truly high quality professional development within our schools.

#### (5) Teacher Education Reform Issues

The lack of truly high quality professional development for teachers and their lack of initial training shared by Deki in the last section are issues consistent with problems with teacher quality in Bhutan already mentioned by Lopen Gyatso from ILCS and Getse in his presentation. Getse addressed the problem at a deep level saying the REC was going to work on better training and also doing things to increase motivation for entering the teaching profession by increasing pay and improving working conditions. REC member Tashi Wangyal also addressed this issue in his interview. After a discussion about the challenge for teachers of teaching differently than what they experienced as students, Tashi went on to share about the problem of getting top quality teachers:

And the tragedy we have found is we have a problem with every graduating class going into a different profession. If you look at a place like Singapore, they have the top 35% in teaching. We're looking at teacher education and creating and improving conditions for teachers – to have talented and motivated teachers because sometimes they have motivation but not talent or are highly motivated but not talented.

The description of the full engagement of talented, motivated teachers at Riverside School and the shift in the attitude of the teachers at Deki's school as they were included in the decision process show that another aspect of the issue is that teachers have to be part of the decision making process to have the motivation to make the deep level commitments to ongoing learning along with their students which is necessary for high quality teaching.

The second response to my question came from Choki Dukpa, the principal of another private school in Bhutan. She also recently attended a training at Riverside School and shared in response to my questions about what she found to be positive about that model and what practices she felt were useful for Bhutan. She also began with her attitude about the experience:

This is my 29<sup>th</sup> year of teaching profession, and as a teacher I have always gone out of the four walls of the classroom teaching and syllabus. I guess that is the reason why I could bring the maximum ideas that can be used in our Bhutanese context. Though it was a short visit I never wasted a single minute, trying to know in and out about the Riverside model.

She then went on to describe the practices she felt were useful for Bhutan:

Some of the doables were the parent partnership, the relationship between the student and the teachers, their learning beacons made visible throughout their teaching through the 3R's – Relevance, Rigour and Relationship, the students' interaction with the community, and putting Common Sense to Common Practice where students can even negotiate their curriculum through voice and choice....some of the useful ideas that I feel our children in Bhutan should get such opportunity.

She concluded by explaining what she has been doing to promote the model since returning to Bhutan:

I have worked so hard ever since I came back to Bhutan. I have been able

to convince colleagues and our education officers and will be working closely with my Key 1 teachers. I got an opportunity to see our Education Secretary and she wanted us to conduct a workshop for the Thimphu principals but without solid proof it would be useless to talk to our friends. So first try out the ideas and then conduct the workshop during the summer holidays.

Choki also presented a more positive view of Bhutanese teachers than some of the others I have described. She seemed to feel the teachers in Bhutan mainly need more guidance in the new philosophy related to Riverside School. She began by comparing and contrasting the teachers at Riverside and in Bhutan:

Teachers (Riverside) are committed to their work for they talk about their school and teaching throughout the day and at home as I have observed them. Later they become expert and are called for to facilitate in different institutes. I guess they are well paid as well. In Bhutan teachers are more committed but there is no one to give guidance. If they are given such an opportunity, I think they can do wonders to our learners because at Riverside School the teachers are getting trained as they teach. Almost all our teachers come out with teaching background in the school and is easy to make them understand when an idea is given. That's the difference!

In a later e-mail she responded to my question of whether this training of Bhutanese teachers in the old style of education would hinder their acceptance of the new one from Riverside:

I think it's becoming very interesting to keep in touch with you. It makes me think and reflect my own views through different perspective.... If the system is going to benefit our children, I think our teachers should be able to accept the change because they too are parents. The failure of the NAPE system (New Approach to Primary Education) a few years back was due to lack of proper guidance and complete training. If teachers are trained vigorously and guided properly there is no question of failure.

My third response came from Bindiya Pradhan, a private school teacher who received training at Riverside School. She wrote this about her experience:

It's my pleasure to share the experiences I had at Riverside. I stayed there

for 4 months and I was very impressed by the education system out there. The lessons are taught in a practical manner which makes learning fun for the kids as well as for better understanding. They have various practices which include: funderstanding, conglom, making learning visible, 3 R's (relevance, rigour, relationship) which leads to awareness, enable, and empower, etc. Well, I'm sure we can implement some of these in our country as well though it will take some time to fully view the site of the Riverside in Bhutan. Right now some of us are attached to private schools and we conducted workshops for the teachers and implemented some of the learnings of Riverside in the curriculum.

### **Parent Involvement in Reform**

The issue of parent involvement was not specifically mentioned in Getse's presentation but has been addressed by others in discussions about the reform process. In his interview Tashi Wangyal spoke of those who needed to be included in the reform effort:

We are very aware that unless what we do is backed by robust detailed research and also consultation with the stakeholders which include parents, children themselves as well as the government officials, we are not going to get very far.

Choki Dukpa mentioned the need for partnership with parents, and in her report to the REC about her experience at Riverside, Deki Choden also discussed parent inclusion as an important issue:

'Parent Partnership' is another area that we need to work on. Discussions are already underway as to what the endorsement of this all important vertical will entail. We can make all the excuses we want, but this is one important resource that we have failed to tap. Our teachers now share the view that we cannot bring about high quality student learning without roping in the support of our parents, together, without playing the blame game.

### **Analysis of the Navigation Process of the REC**

Being able to communicate directly with five of the members of the REC and others working with them on the school reform process in Bhutan has allowed me to

gain a good sense of their navigation process. One thing that has become clear is that the REC members consider themselves to be at the beginning of a long term navigation process which has its basic principles established but the details of its outworking still very much in flux. There is a clear sense that the mission of the REC is to create a new education system that is based on traditional values as expressed in GNH and that incorporates best practices of Western student-centered education which are compatible with those values and prepares Bhutanese students to function in the broader world. There is also a clear awareness that this process has many interconnected aspects and that it will take time and needs to be done in small steps of trying out options and then accepting or rejecting them depending on their success and compatibility with GNH and different local education settings in Bhutan. The process will involve models demonstrating success and not externally forced changes. Tashi Wangyal stated this vision clearly in his interview after we had a discussion about holistic medicine :

As you said with holistic medicine, we are working on systemic reform. You can't fix the curriculum and leave the infrastructure as it is – you can't fix infrastructure and the curriculum but not change the teachers – so we are looking at systemic reform.... We are under no illusion that we can change the entire system of 500 schools plus – a few thousand teachers and 150,000 students – we can't do it overnight. But what we can do is bring about best practices, have beacon schools that people can – you know if you have a positive demonstrated effect. We can talk for 10 years and do nothing. Or in the next few years we can start 2 or 3 leading – good leading schools where we have best practices and that can have a far greater impact.

### **REC Reform in Light of Key Elements for Successful Reform**

I now want to examine the reform proposals of the REC in relationship to the

four essential elements for successful reform derived from the work of well-known school reform researcher Seymour Sarason (1990) by John Tharp (2008). Tharp used these elements to evaluate six school reform efforts in the U.S. His research and that of Sarason indicate that a lack of any of these elements will prevent the success of school reform efforts. The REC is only at the beginning stages of reform so I will look at its goals, models, and proposed actions in light of these elements. I will list the components of the four elements and discuss which ones the REC proposal for reform is successfully addressing and which ones are not addressed or present challenges in its work.

1. Change Theory – The reform plan needs to address these points related to change: recognizes the limitations of the encapsulated classroom, questions assumptions about school structure, works towards a more collaborative and inquiring teacher-student relationship, recognizes that change must include involvement of families and the community, and researches past reforms.

As the examples provided in this chapter demonstrate, the REC reform plan addresses the points about questioning assumptions about school structure and working toward a more collaborative and inquiring teacher-student relationship very well. I have not seen the point about recognizing the limits of the encapsulated classroom addressed directly except by Choki Dukpa, but the Riverside and the iDiscoveri models the REC has chosen do include active learning outside the four walls of a classroom.

The REC is very involved in research related to alternative models of education

and has some awareness of past reforms in Bhutan that have not worked due to being done in a fragmented rather than a holistic manner and being driven by external consultants rather than shaped to the local situation with the input of all stakeholders. Several mentions were made of successful reform efforts related to teacher quality in Singapore which is being looked at as a model, but I have heard no mention of studying past reform efforts in other countries in relationship to what did not work. Although members of the REC have mentioned in passing that they have been learning what has not worked as well as what has through their travels and discussions with people around the world. The point about the involvement of parents and the community was mentioned by Tashi, Choki, and Deki as an important component of successful reform, but I have not seen any specific proposals as to how that will be done. Also I have heard many statements about the difficulties in making certain reforms due to parents' mindsets which the REC hopes to change through successful model schools. This issue seems to be one of the challenges the REC has to deal with in its reform efforts.

2. Teaching Theory – The reform plan needs to address these points related to a theory of teaching: promotes productive learning that is cognitive, affective, emotional, motivational, and attitudinal; gets beyond 'pouring in knowledge' model to a model with whole child development at its core; promotes student-centered learning powered by internal motivation; assures that all children can develop their potential in learning.

As can be seen in the examples I provided and many similar ones I have not

mentioned, the REC reform proposal clearly presents all of these points as reform goals. It has chosen models which exemplify the fulfillment of these points and plans to establish beacon schools to do the same.

3. Teaching Profession: The reform plan needs to address these points related to the teaching profession: provides significant opportunities for teacher development, supports teachers in ‘unlearning’ old ideas that are counter-productive to the larger aims of the reform, provides models of effective teaching, plans realistic work schedules for teachers.

The REC recognizes that improving all aspects of the teaching profession in Bhutan is one of its most important tasks. As was shared earlier, it realizes the serious problems with the quality of teachers and the teacher shortage in Bhutan and has plans to address all of the problems related to the teaching profession. It has already sent teachers and administrators for training at Riverside School so they will be ready to open a beacon school based on this model in 2010. The greatest challenge seems to relate to motivating high quality students to become teachers. The REC has plans to increase teacher salaries and to improve working conditions. However, to actually accomplish this goal also requires changing mindsets in Bhutan so that teaching is seen as a respected profession.

4. School Power and Politics: The reform plan should deal with these points related to dealing with political and power issues: gains government support, deals with socio-economic issues, restructures the entrenched school bureaucracy as a horizontal structure that puts teachers and parents

in important decision-making roles, conducts ongoing evaluation of reforms and makes adjustments as necessary, finds a way to recognize threats from educational bureaucratic policymakers and finds ways to work with their mandates without compromising the essence of their reform.

This element of school reform seems to be the most challenging one for the REC. As suggested in this factor for success, the REC has definite plans to conduct ongoing evaluations of reforms and make adjustments. The school administrators sent by the REC for training at Riverside School also have this attitude. I have heard some allusions to dealing with socio-economic issues but have not seen any definite plans.

The REC certainly has support at the highest level of government because the members have been directly commissioned by the King who is greatly admired by nearly all Bhutanese. It is also in the process of crafting a relationship with the Ministry of Education. The proposed plan is that the Ministry will focus on running the current system now and later incorporate the successful reforms the REC accomplishes through its beacon schools into the school system. This sounds like a positive direction to move for a smooth transition to a new type of school system and one that will avoid the tension of one group trying to do both at the same time. Choki Dukpa also described a positive response from some Ministry officials who asked her to lead a workshop on her experience with the Riverside reform model. However, as already discussed there are some tensions between the two groups related to the unwillingness of some members of the Ministry to admit there are

problems in the system.

As for the point of restructuring the current school bureaucracy as a horizontal structure, the REC currently does not have the power to do that. If that were to happen, it would have to be done by the Ministry making the choice to restructure for the sake of aligning with GNH or possibly by a vote of the public since Bhutan is now a democracy. The King's support for such a plan would definitely help in its acceptance. Also the education ministry in Bhutan has been in existence a much shorter time than the bureaucracies in the West so might be easier to restructure. In addition, the current Minister of Education, Thakhur Powdyel, has been very involved in the plans to align education in Bhutan with GNH and may be supportive of change.

If, however, the system is not restructured to a more horizontal model, the tensions between the philosophies of the current bureaucratic model and the proposed student-centered model with input from students, teachers and parents may cause difficulty for the establishment of reform despite the good intentions of all involved. This difference in philosophies is related to the conflict between Tyler's model of learning as a "specifically intended, directed, and controlled outcome" and Dewey's view of learning as a by-product of experiential activity (Doll, 2005) and to the conflict between the methodology of modern education split into disconnected content areas and the methodologies of holistic education in the former traditional way of learning in Bhutan. The two pairs in the philosophies seem antithetical in many ways, so if the current bureaucratic system maintains its same form and takes

over the administration of the new style of schools, this may limit the success of reform initiated by the REC.

In addition to issues related to working with a bureaucracy, creating a horizontal structure that puts teachers in important decision-making roles appears to be a challenge in Bhutan because of the current teacher quality problem. However, it may become feasible in school settings as the quality of teacher training and development becomes better and the Riverside model is followed. This is certainly the view of Choki Dukpa. Some of this type of training is being done by Choki and Deki Choden, the two administrators who received training at Riverside School.

The inclusion of parents in the decision making structure is even more of a challenge. As already shared, older parents and those in rural areas may not have experienced Western style education, or if they have, they have not reached a high level of education and are not considered to have any expertise in education. These parents could possibly become more involved in the system if their traditional knowledge and the traditional learning methodologies are valued and incorporated more into the school system as I suggested at the end of the previous chapter. In fact, as I wrote earlier, it has been parents who found a way to improve their children's public school success in Dzongkha by taking them to Tamshing monastery to study during the break, effectively combining the traditional monastic system and the Western system.

Also as already shared, some parents now have the mindset of education as the path to economic success and a guaranteed high level government job. Therefore,

unless their mindset can be changed, they may not be supportive of reform efforts to create a more student-centered education system which helps students pursue their individual talents but may not provide a clear path to economic success. As was discussed in chapter three, the need to change unrealistic parent and student expectations that high school graduation will automatically result in a government job is clearly stated in the last Five-Year Plan. Our guide Ngodup Dorji explained that these expectations are tied to what actually happened in the past when few people had the education necessary for such jobs. The expectations also seem to be tied to the concept of education for economic success inherent in the Western education model. With these expectations having roots in both people's past experience and the current education system, changing people's mindsets regarding them is considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of navigating educational change by those involved in school reform in Bhutan. The REC is attempting to do this through demonstrating the success of the student-centered model in beacon schools and helping people become more clear about the working out of the GNH policy in education.

### **REC Reform in Light of Literature on Creating New Way of Living**

As discussed earlier, the literature related to navigation of culture change which creates a new way of living by combining elements of two or more ways of living describes certain key characteristics which are essential for leaders of the navigation process to possess. These include a clear vision of one's own way of living including its essential values and a deep understanding of the history and

philosophies which comprise the values of the other way of living but may not be obvious through its current words and proposed goals. Awareness of both of these is essential for knowing which elements of the systems are compatible with the values desired for the new way of living. Also considered essential is a flexible way of thinking which can consider issues from many perspectives. I will now look at the work of the REC in relationship to these factors. Although I would need to continue to spend time with REC members in many settings to fully research this topic, I will present some of my preliminary impressions now.

#### (1) Awareness of Their Own Way of Living

As far as a clear vision of their own way of living and awareness of its values, the members of the REC seem to have an appreciation for the way of life in Bhutan and to consider the continuation of its traditional values as very important. There seems to be less awareness of which specific aspects of Bhutanese life are crucial to maintaining those values. This is being worked on by the REC, but Getse shared in a conversation that it is difficult to help people to know what to keep and what to let go of when a society is confronted with changes.

As I stated in the last chapter, some research on and incorporation within the public school system of the traditional methodology of storytelling has been done, but there has been little research on the other traditional learning methodologies and their connection to Bhutanese values. This may partly be because non-monastic traditional learning in Bhutan was not part of a formal system so was not thought of consciously as education but just as part of living as several of my interviewees

shared. Therefore, those living in Bhutan may not be fully aware of the importance that this way of learning which uses traditional methodologies has for their value system. The REC does seem to have some awareness of the value of this type of learning but could do more research on this since there is such a large population in Bhutan who has experienced this kind of learning.

## (2) Awareness of Western Education System

As far as awareness of the Western forms of education, the members of the REC do seem to have clarity about the problems of their current “chalk and talk” model and the benefits of a number of alternative models based on the best practices derived from Western research. In fact, they have chosen a student-centered model which does incorporate much of the essence of the traditional way of learning in Bhutan by making learning meaningful to children’s lives in a way that fits the current situation of the world. Although they have some awareness of the problems now, they are having to deal with a seeming lack of awareness in the past of the unintended effects inherent within the Western education system, such as the attitude of parents and students that education is mainly valuable for economic reasons.

It may be that the REC could benefit from further study of the research on these effects elsewhere. Bhutan has a history of rejecting many offers of money and other assistance from outside sources if there was a sense these would interfere with Bhutanese values. We heard many stories about such events. However, in what I

have read and heard about the introduction of Western education to Bhutan, it seemed that there was not as much awareness of the history of Western education and the long term effects on values of introducing this system to Bhutan. When I asked REC member Sangay Jamtsho about this, he replied in this way:

I will be happy to share whatever I know. However, I must admit they will be mostly my own humble opinions. I am not so sure whether Bhutan has been less careful about Western education. However, I think as compared to other sectors, government policies and laws tend to be less well articulated for education. I'm inclined to believe that there is less awareness of the 'unintended effects' than would expect. Our system is basically a one-size-fits-all type, exam-oriented often promoting a lot of rote learning and very little of skills.

His statement about government policies and laws being less well articulated for education may fit with what I shared earlier about Bhutanese being less conscious about their own method of traditional education and that not being clearly verbalized or formulated. Another statement related to this was made by Ashi Choden:

So if I talk about it in more of an objective way now, it's because I've learned the language – a whole other dialect – the words, but in those days we never thought about it as education

Diki Wangmo, Deputy Director of the Royal Institute of Health Sciences, addressed the point about not having a specific word for traditional education in Bhutanese languages in an e-mail communication in March, 2009. I asked her if there was a word used in Bhutanese languages to generally describe this type of traditional education. She responded this way, particularly about learning activities that were part of daily living:

From what I can remember as a child, we did not really use any specific word to describe these activities....We just used to use the word 'lhap nee' which means

learning or to learn.

This is in contrast to the medical system in Bhutan which is clearly formulated and fully integrated, with traditionally trained doctors and Western trained doctors working together out of the same hospitals and referring patients to one another. The traditional medical system has thousands of years of history and is clearly articulated so can be used as the foundation of the medical system with useful elements of Western medicine also adopted into the Bhutanese system. The use of the monastic curriculum provides a similar foundation for the ILCS which has then added useful elements of Western education. However, the REC is starting with a foundation of a foreign Western system which it has to somehow restructure to incorporate the essence of its traditional education values and methodologies without those having been clearly articulated in the past.

I visited several medical facilities since my traveling partner Dr. Reynolds is trained as a naturopathic physician as well as a cognitive psychologist . We had breakfast with Dr. Ngawang, a Western-trained doctor who is the director of the hospital at Thimphu. He shared with us about Bhutan's integrated medical system and the importance of knowing the strengths and weaknesses of both systems so as to know which works best for which problems, saying that traditional medicine works best for chronic problems. He also spoke in detail about the history of conventional and alternative Western medicine as well as the history of traditional Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese medicine. This type of broad knowledge about the history of all forms of education, traditional and Western, may be of benefit to the

REC as they try to create a kind of integrated education system in Bhutan that combines traditional and Western elements and is aligned with GNH.

### (3) Capacity for Flexible Thinking

Finally, I will look at the work of the REC in light of the factor of the need for flexible thinking in order to create a new way of living from elements of the traditional and modern ways. The members of the REC and their associates whom I have communicated with seem to recognize the need for and possess a flexibility in their thinking. This quality has already been discussed in relation to statements of REC members about the need to research many models of learning, try them out, evaluate their success or failure, and make adjustments. The quality of flexible thinking has been associated by some in the literature with bicultural experience which allows people to experience another way of living and become more aware of their own way of living in the process. The four members of the REC whom I met all have had experience living and studying in other countries. In fact, two of them spoke about their time in other countries helping them to see more about both positive and negative aspects of their own way of living as well as those of the other way of living.

Tashi Wangyal shared this experience about his university study in Canada:

I had dinner with a big donor – of a fellowship in a small school I went to. I was the school salutatorian. (He said) ‘Yah Tashi, ... you must have had a culture shock when you came here.’ I said ‘Because I have read a lot, I have expected these things.’ I said, ‘Not really.’ But he insisted. So I said, ‘Yeah, I did have a culture shock.’ And then, they were keen to find out what it was. I said, ‘You know I was shocked to find out that in a country as advanced as Canada you have a homeless problem. They are found on every street corner of

Vancouver. This is not what I expected Canada to be.' ...The longer I stayed abroad the more I appreciated what we have here.

Chencho Lhamu received her education in Bhutan until grade twelve, went to India on scholarship for her bachelor's degree, and then got her master's degree in Australia. When I asked her to describe for me a learning experience of hers that spontaneously came to mind, she gave this answer:

My stay in Bangalore was the most enriching in terms of learning. In retrospect, I think my mind opened up, interacting with many friends from different parts of the world. Another time was my stay in Australia. I learnt that there is so much to learn and realized the deficiencies of our own education system in Bhutan.

The members of the REC seem to have many of the qualities needed for creating a new form of education in Bhutan that is aligned with GNH, one incorporating traditional values and preparing students to function in the broader world. REC reform proposals also include most of the factors which the literature considers essential for school reform success. However, the REC also faces the many challenges in their navigation process described earlier. This process will take some time, and much more can be learned from further research as it unfolds.

### **Summary of the Navigation Processes of the ILCS and the REC**

The two education organizations in Bhutan I have chosen to compare and contrast in this chapter are both navigating educational change at a time when Bhutanese society is continuing to experience many changes and the Bhutanese government is attempting to align all aspects of life with GNH. This chapter examines the experiences of the ILCS and the REC to answer this question: Given

the commitment to traditional values, what are some of the challenges faced by two institutions in Bhutan in their navigation process to create a new form of education which combines elements from traditional and Western ways of living and is aligned with GNH, and how are those challenges being addressed as they make crucial choices?

The findings from my study provide evidence of some similarities between the two organizations: Some of the larger social challenges faced by both are the same, both need a deep awareness of their own way of living and the Western education system, and both must exercise flexible thinking to do their navigation of change. However, they are starting from very different foundations and have very different purposes.

The ILCS is expected to continue to function as an institution of higher learning which is part of the RUB. During its history of changes in the last forty-eight years, it has not been required to change its traditional monastic curriculum, languages, and values but has added the study of English and technology and changed its teaching style to become more student-centered. The director mentioned some of the challenges arising from government requirements and changes in society but emphasized the conscious choices made by the ILCS in concert with the government to preserve the traditional curriculum and values of the ILCS while it also prepares students to function in the broader world. His one expression of a problem that has not been resolved is the loss of the strong sense of inner motivation of students as the ILCS had become more standardized.

The REC, on the other hand, is a temporary organization established by the king to do research and based on that to enact education reform to align the Bhutanese system with GNH. It is to do this in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and plans to do much of its work through the use of beacon schools which can be a testing ground for new education practices and then become models for reform when successful. The REC is also promoting a student-centered model of learning but has no traditional base curriculum to use but must create a curriculum which incorporates traditional values and also prepares students to function in the larger world. This process is made more difficult because the traditional form of education in Bhutan was not clearly formulated or articulated but was just seen as part of living.

The reform process of the REC seems to incorporate most of the key elements considered essential by Sarason and Tharp for successful school reform. The biggest challenges for the REC appear to be the inclusion of parents in school reform and the creation of a horizontal form of governance for the school system which is consistent with their philosophy of a student-centered education system which invites input from students, parents, and the wider community. The next chapter will describe some of the insights Western educators can gain from studying the navigation processes of these two institutions, particularly the reform process of the REC, as well as the experiences of those interviewed in the chapter on individuals' learning experiences.

## Chapter Six

### IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN THE U.S.

Before I present the implications for research and practice in the U.S, I will restate my research themes/questions and summarize my findings. The research themes are:

1. What are common characteristics of those Bhutanese trained in non-Western education methodologies? How do these characteristics hold for those receiving Western education? In what ways do the experiences of those traditionally educated relate to the current navigation process of creating an education system in Bhutan which is aligned with GNH?

My analysis of the interviews of three groups of people from Bhutan provides evidence that there are more similarities than differences in beliefs about and experiences of learning among interviewees from all three groups: those only or first educated by non-Western methodologies, those educated in Bhutan's public schools who also were participants in some type of traditional learning, and those who were educated mainly in Catholic schools in India but also kept a strong connection to their families and Bhutanese heritage. Three common themes emerged across groups: 1) formal learning was seen as related to spiritual/moral development, 2) their experiences of learning were associated with a sense of meaning and personal/internal motivation, and 3) alphabetic literacy was seen to be strongly related to formal learning. Also common to all groups was participation in some type of non-Western learning methodology, either formally or informally

The beliefs and common characteristics of those interviewed resulting from their experiences with traditional, non-western learning methodologies seem to be very

compatible with the philosophy of GNH, particularly the belief that one of the main purposes of formal learning is to promote spiritual/moral development. The importance of internal motivation and meaningful learning to these interviewees also fits well with an education system aligned with GNH

2. Given the commitment to traditional values, what are some of the challenges faced by two institutions in Bhutan in their navigation process to create a new form of education which combines elements from traditional and Western ways of living? How are those challenges being addressed?

The findings from my study provide evidence of some similarities between two organizations, the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies (ILCS) and the Royal Education Council (REC). Some of the larger social challenges due to changes in Bhutan related to modern development are the same for both, both need a deep awareness of their own way of living and the Western education system, and both must exercise flexible thinking to do their navigation of change. However, they are starting from very different foundations and have very different purposes.

The ILCS began as the first lay institute for monastic studies and is now part of the Royal University of Bhutan. It has not been required to change its traditional monastic curriculum, languages, and values but has added the study of English and technology and changed its teaching style to become more student-centered. Its greatest challenge is cultivating a strong personal/ internal motivation among its students with a secondary challenge of having to deal with a weak foundation in the knowledge of Dzongkha in its students.

The REC, on the other hand, is a temporary organization established by the king

to do research and based on that to enact education reform to align the Bhutanese system with GNH. The REC is also promoting a student-centered model of learning by creating model schools, but it has no traditional base curriculum to use but must create a curriculum which incorporates traditional values and also prepares students to function in the larger world. The biggest challenges for the REC appear to be increasing teacher quality, the inclusion of parents in school reform, and the creation of a horizontal form of governance for the school system which is consistent with their philosophy of a student-centered education system which invites input from students, parents, and the wider community.

### **Areas of the Literature Contributed to by This Study**

The implications of my findings for researchers and educators in Bhutan were shared in the two previous chapters. This chapter will address some areas where this research adds to the literature and brings up questions for further study and where it provides models for beneficial education practices that could be adopted in the U.S..

There are five areas in the literature for which this study provides additional evidence and topics for further study: literacy, traditional learning methodologies, internal motivation in learning, student-centered schooling, and the navigation process of school reform.

#### **(1) Literacy**

This study adds additional support for the view of “ideological literacy” (Street, 1985). Bhutan is another example of a society where people use literacy for different purposes which they choose. Bhutanese use literacy in Chokey/Dzongkha

and other Bhutanese languages mainly for spiritual, cultural, and personal reasons and literacy in English for economic and social reasons and school success.

Additional information related to the effects of Western schooling on non-alphabetic literacies is also provided by this research. Similar to the youth in other traditional societies after the introduction of Western schooling, Bhutanese young people are no longer learning to read the “texts” of nature, knowledge of which is necessary for success in traditional agriculture and a holistic worldview. In contrast, the traditional “texts” of dance and ritual are still understood in Bhutan to some degree, possibly because they are part of regular cultural and religious performances in which people of all ages participate but which they do not have to deeply understand. Further study of this situation may yield information on what factors are necessary for the preservation of expertise in traditional literacies when students attend Western schools.

## (2) Traditional Learning Methodologies

My preliminary investigation of the experiences of people who were trained only or first in non-Western/traditional learning methodologies provides additional evidence that experience with these methodologies brings the beneficial effects already discussed in the literature. The effects of oral storytelling and focused memorization were especially clear in the experiences of these interviewees. Those trained in these methodologies showed strong right brain awareness, exhibited an understanding of complexity and flexible thinking, were able to switch back and

forth from linear answers to metaphors and stories in answers to questions, and described things from many perspectives. The case of the children who go to Tamshing Monastery during winter break to learn the alphabet through traditional memorization methodology and then show improvement in Dzongkha in the public schools is consistent with the findings of Wright (2001) in Eritrea and Luria (1966) in Russia related to the value of this learning methodology. Using this methodology with children learning the alphabet could be experimented with in schools in the U.S.

Although my findings related to this aspect of the research are consistent with the literature, I was not able to observe these people in various situations to see if these effects held in all contexts or if other effects surfaced. This is definitely an area where further research could not only aid the Bhutanese to see how these non-Western methodologies relate to their culture and values but also provide more evidence as to whether their use results in general benefits across contexts as the literature already suggests it does. Bhutan is an excellent place to do such research because it is one of the few places in the world where a significant portion of the population under sixty has not had experience with Western schooling but has learned through these non-Western methodologies. In depth study of the effects of the experiences of these people could help us understand more about the dynamics of these methodologies and how they could be more widely used in the U.S. education system.

One other related area for further study to increase understanding of these

methodologies is to research the words used in Dzongkha for monastic learning, Western education, and apprenticeship and other traditional learning methodologies to see if there is a difference in their root meanings and the values associated with the words. This would be particularly interesting with Dzongkha because many words have had to be created in the language for modern concepts and institutions.

### (3) Internal Motivation in Learning

This study confirms the findings in the literature related to the importance of learning being meaningful and the lessening of internal motivation through participation in schooling based on external rewards. The traditionally educated interviewees all demonstrated the importance of personal and social meaning in their learning, and several made clear statements about this point and the absence of this internal motivation in many students today. The director of the ILCS and some members of the REC also commented on the importance of meaning in learning and their concern about the lack of internal motivation in current students who are now part of a system with extrinsic rewards.

Evidence is also provided for the naturally occurring desire to learn in children. Tashi Wangyal gave an example of this natural curiosity and the internal motivation demonstrated by his daughter when he educated her at home. Although the research on this issue of internal motivation has often been ignored in the U.S. with its system so often still following a behaviorist model based on external rewards, in Bhutan awareness of this issue has led leaders to look at other models of schooling to solve this problem. Those schools will be discussed in the next point and could become

models for student-centered learning which fosters internal motivation in the U.S. as well as in Bhutan.

#### (4) Student-Centered schooling

More examples of student-centered schooling similar to some of those in the literature were discussed in this study. Bhutan has chosen two schools which focus on student-centered learning as its models for beacon schools: Riverside School and iDiscoveri Preschools in India. These schools integrate Eastern and Western philosophies and practices and have a cooperative model of school leadership which includes students, parents, and community members as well as teachers and school administrators. Those in the U.S. who are interested in student-centered, shared-governance schooling could learn a great deal by researching these two schools in India further and observing the process of how Bhutan proceeds to adapt the models.

#### (5) Navigation Process of School Reform

Bhutan is in the process of very significant school reform to align its education system with GNH. Study of the navigation of this reform process in Bhutan can give us many general insights into the reform process. I consider this to be a very significant point which I will discuss in detail now.

#### **Insights for the U.S. from School Reform Process in Bhutan**

Bhutan and the U.S. are so different in many ways that it may seem impossible to compare them in any meaningful way. However, there is one way in which they are quite similar. They both have a public school system built on a content-, exam- and teacher-centered foundation, and school reformers in both

countries face similar problems that are inherent in that system. As REC leader GetsePenjor said in his presentation at UCSB, Bhutan's education problems are common problems, the same as those of the U.S. The spread of the standardized Western model of education has resulted in a kind of monoculture of education globally. Although the specific reform solutions for the problems common to this system may take somewhat different forms in each country, the essence of the reform solutions and the type of process necessary for reaching them will be similar.

Educators in the U.S. can learn a great deal by observing the school reform navigation process of Bhutan, particularly because its members are doing this navigation very consciously and are open to discuss their process. I found great openness and willingness to talk about their experiences and thoughts during their navigation process with members of the REC and their associates in Bhutan. Many of the people I met have continued to communicate with me over the past eleven months and have connected me with others in Bhutan also interested in this process of navigating education change. This attitude opens the door to further research of this process.

By following the school reform navigation process in Bhutan, U.S educators can observe this navigation process in a context small enough and far enough removed from their own situation to see issues more clearly while there are enough similarities for them to resonate with many aspects of the process. Possibly U.S. educators can also create similar schools which can serve as models of student-centered learning as charter schools or private schools. Certainly educators from the

U.S. can also share helpful learning from their experiences with the Bhutanese school reformers who are always open to learn. However, my sense, which I expressed many times while I was in Bhutan, is that U.S. educators have a great deal to learn from Bhutanese educators and school reformers. I will end with a description of some of the lessons I think U.S. educators can learn from education reformers in Bhutan who possess these qualities:

- An awareness that school reform takes time and constant adjustment
- Flexibility in thinking
- Honesty about the difficulty of reform
- Humility in attitude which does not assert knowledge without evidence
- Awareness of the importance of values and inner motivation in learning
- An openness and desire to communicate with one another and others about the reform process
- Having people from many areas of expertise working together to accomplish school reform
- Including teachers in decisions about school reform
- Having two collaborating groups, one of which focuses on researching and implementing new models of education and the other on running the current system and later implementing the successful models of the first group

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